

Notes on the Meroitic “Epistolary” Tradition : new texts from Arminna West and Qasr Ibrim

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Introduction

A more complete understanding of the ancient Meroitic language has been hampered by the rather limited range of text types that have been studied and published, largely funerary stelae and monumental inscriptions. Ostraca and other inscribed material, of which a wealth has been recovered from the excavations at Qasr Ibrim, provide an additional body of texts which presumably relate to very different kinds of expressions and transactions. Some of these, such as groups published by Griffith (1911) represent very minor texts, but others are more substantial, and clearly have considerably more potential for analysis. One potentially productive way forward is to select from these kinds of texts those that contain formulaic elements. Millet has drawn attention to the opening formula repeated on a number of ostraca, suggesting that these may represent a possible protocol for “letters”. In his dissertation (Millet 1968 : 384-5), he briefly drew attention to the parallel construction occurring at the beginning of an ostrakon published by Griffith (1911) and one recovered from the AWH area at Arminna West, published by Trigger (1967 : 74, Fig. 54,1). Subsequently, he explored a number of similar texts with this “epistolary formula” in a short paper (Millet 1977).

Several further texts with examples of this formula, or variants thereof, are now known, including further ostraca from Arminna West and examples written on papyrus and wooden tablets from Qasr Ibrim. In this brief discussion we present a number of these previously unpublished texts which serve to amplify and on occasions clarify points previously made by Millet concerning his Meroitic “letter” protocol. These further examples also allow us to provide some further suggestions concerning the construction of these texts. Prior to the full publica-

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tion of the substantial quantity of unpublished texts from Qasr Ibrim, it would be premature to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the few Ibrim texts included here. It should be noted that some further, more fragmentary examples of similar texts have been identified amongst the corpus of textual finds, but these are not included here as they add little to the points we wish to discuss in this context. More generally, ongoing work on the other texts suggests that detailed analyses should focus on the full body of material ; interim studies based on samples of the material are unlikely to be very satisfactory.

The original texts discussed by Millet included an ostracon from Arminna West (A1 = REM 1096), three more fragmentary examples from Karanog (K1-3 = REM 0345, 0346, 0361) and a previously unpublished example from Tila island (Kh = REM 1152), a substantial settlement in the centre of the Batn el Hajar close to Semna³. The texts of two best-preserved examples, the ostraca from Arminna (A1) and Tila island (Kh) are given below, with a few comments on possible alternative readings, including some suggested by Claude Rilly, to whom we are very grateful :

REM 1096 - Arminna Ostracon 1 (Fig. 1)

- 1 *ptiyeseyi* : *w*
 teli : *pkeli* : *yi*
 rohetowi : *wos* : *wo*
 s : *mlwilise* : *mlowi*
 5 *yni* : *bnebeseni*
 wyekitelowi : *mke*
 mn : *yiblik* : *we.i*
 bbqoke : *blhre*
 yi : *yekte* : *klme*
 10 *se 1* : *mleyi* : *yekte* :
 krekre biro
 hebto : *bolmk.k*
 nlise : *nld..*
 ?]lme. : *.ns* :

Notes :

line 1 : Millet's reading of *ptiyeseyi* (1977, p. 316) may be preferable to *pliyeseyi*.

line 5 : the reading of *bnebeyoni* for *bnebeseni* is also possible, but unlikely.

line 7 : Trigger reads *yiblik*, Millet *yibtik*. The following word remains unclear, *wedi* (also appearing in AWK6-1, REM 0094/22 and REM 1182) may also be possible.

line 8 : the final sign may be an *-i* rather than an *-e*.

3. The remains of the substantial settlement and cemeteries at Tila have yet to be fully published. A brief description of the site may be found in Edwards 1996 : Appendix 3.

- line 9-10 : Millet reads *klmese*. The final stroke in line 10 resembles a numeral 1, which suggests the possibility of a missing strokes on the edge of the ostracon and before the numeral ; *yikidkeklmese1* appears in REM 1182.
- line 12 : *bolmk.k* remains tentative, the end of the line being very uncertain.
- line 13 : the second word may be *nld.* but remains uncertain.

REM 1152 - Tila island (Fig. 2)

- 1 *antli* : w.[
 rohetowi : d [
 lwilise : m [
 nebeseni : [
 5 *hote* : be. [
 keni : [
 dew [

Notes :

line 5 : *hote* seems preferable to *sote* ; *hotiteye* appears in QI72.11.14/8. After this, *be.* appears more likely than *bl.*

Two new ostraca from Arminna West

Two previously unpublished ostraca from the Pennsylvania-Yale excavations at Arminna West will be discussed first. Both of these come from areas of the settlement site which were not included in the published reports (Trigger 1967 ; Weeks 1967) but will be included in a forthcoming publication (Fuller *in prep.*). During the final season of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Nubia (September-October 1963), three buildings, dated to the Late Meroitic to early post-Meroitic periods were excavated in the settlement area, while further work was carried out in the necropolis area west of the site. The inscriptions from the cemetery have been published (Trigger and Heyler 1970) as were twelve ostraca from area AWH of the settlement (Trigger 1967). However, two further ostraca from area AWE on the southern end of the settlement area and one from building AWK excavated on the northern end of the site were not included in these reports, and are included in the forthcoming report.

AWE.S-1

Ostracon painted in black ink. 7 lines preserved, many of which are clearly broken off on the left hand side. AWE.S-1 (n° 495 in the Pennsylvania-Yale 1963 field register) was recovered on the surface of the fill over area E, where the plans of two buildings were exposed. The ceramics from this area of the site, which included a few decorated fineware bowls, suggest

a late Meroitic date, probably in the mid-third century AD. This dating is supported by internal evidence of this ostrakon itself, since it appears to contain the name Abaratoye, perhaps the well-attested *peseto* of AD 253 and 260 (see further discussion, below). (Fig. 3)

- 1 *sweyoyo : a* [
 wteli pkeli [?
 wos : dolhlise [?
 abrtoye : me [?
 5 *pelde 1 mḥbe*
 yeletewe [
 piqe [

Notes :

line 1 : begins with a name, *Sweyoyo*, apparently not hitherto attested, and line 4 contains another name, *Abrtoye*. It is tempting to associate this with the name of the well-attested *peseto* of the mid-third century. The name of *Abrtoye* is known in three languages. In the demotic inscription of a Nubian, Pasan at Philae (FHN III : 1000, n° 260), dated to AD 253, *3brty* is recorded to be *pe sy-nsw* (the Egyptian form of *peseto*). *Abrtoye* left his own inscription at Philae in Greek (FHN III : 1020, n° 265), dated to AD 260, in which his name occurs as *Abratoeis* and his title as *psentes*. He is additionally known in Meroitic from his own funerary monument from Karanog/Tomas, where his name is given as *Brtoye* (REM 1088). In view of the simple structure of the name [(a)br : “man” + suffix -to + suffix of personal name -ye], it is perhaps premature to assume the name is unique and identify the individual named here, lacking any title, with a *peseto*. However, the possibility remains intriguing. The final signs may be *me*, or less probably *se*.

line 5 : the final *shbe* could also be *mḥbe*.

line 6 : the reading of the final signs *we* remains tentative.

AWK.6-1

Ostrakon written on red ware body sherds with red slip, some rilling is notable on interior (concave, reverse) surface. Inscription in white paint on both surfaces. The lower portion of inscription may be missing (bottom two lines)⁴. (Pennsylvania-Yale 1963 field register #519) (Fig. 4)

Observe (Convex surface)

- 1 *beliyi : wtep* [
 ke : yiroḥetowi

4. This sherd was retained by the Cairo museum (JE 90015) and was not by examined the authors. Transcription was prepared from photographs and drawings.

3 *mnp* : *wwi* : *alote*
 bso : *yholbto* : *ked* :
 5 *hrlw* : *btbretwi*
 mte : *yheyekel* : *pe*
 pnete : *hrekemete*
 qerk : *qesliwi* : *p*
 tk : *lh* : *qdip* [
 10 *hlile* : [
] *e* : *ye* [

Notes :

line 3 : the first word appears to be the god *Amanap*. The word *wwi* occurs in Arminna ostraca 2, 1. 7. *Alote* is a toponym.

line 4 : in the second word *s* or *m* are less likely than *h*. Millet has recently proposed that *ked* is a verb meaning something along the lines of, "to slay" (1996). An alternate reading would be *ped*.

line 5 : the first word could read *mrlw*.

line 7 : *mrekemete* may also be possible instead of *hrekemete*.

line 8 : *qes-li-wi* would seem to refer to Kush "followed" by two particles.

line 9 : *tk* is a particle⁵. An alternative reading for the final word is *qdik*l.

Reverse (Concave side)

1 *qdineyi* : *py*
 nibdne : *modi*
 kitel : *wedi*
 tek : *bnte* : *di*
 5 *bene* : *tidbhe*
 kese : *bobt* : *hm*
 heremo : *dew*
 ...] *lene* : *yeke*.
 .y...

Notes :

lines 2-3 : the second word may be *qdikitel* rather than *modikitel*.

line 3 : the last word could be *adi*. Note that in the line drawing the first two characters resemble *a* but in the photograph a reading of *w* followed by *e* seems more likely.

lines 5 and 7 : the first *b* is very tentative. *l* might be read instead of *e*.

5. Cf. Trigger & Heyler 1970.

line 6 : *kese* is likely, but *ase* is a possible reading. *as* occurs as a funerary offering in a number of funerary stelae (e.g. Millet 1982 : 77) ; it has been speculated to mean “cow”, or some other livestock (Millet 1996 : 614).

line 7 : the first word may be *heremo*, but the initial sign is uncertain and it may also have terminated with a *-q* rather than *-mo*.

line 8 : the last character is highly fragmentary.

Texts from Qasr Ibrim

Five further texts come from Qasr Ibrim, two papyrus docketts and the others small wooden tablets, recovered during various excavation seasons 1972-1984. These were found in a range of contexts, none of which seem likely to be primary. As has been found during recent excavations, quantities of Meroitic textual material, including papyrus fragments (e.g. REM 1274) and ostraca, were commonly incorporated in later deposits. It should be noted that while several texts and text fragments were recovered during recent excavations of a post-Meroitic building complex (Edwards 1996 ; Edwards 1998), there is no evidence to suggest that the texts were contemporary with the building. On the contrary, they were almost certainly introduced into the area along with large dumps of material brought from elsewhere on the site, during the infilling of cellars and other construction activities. The original documents all remain in Egypt and the readings presented here are all based on archive photographs or handcopies.

QI72.12.3/4

Papyrus docket, originally folded. Written in black ink on one side only. Top of document preserved but much of right side lost along with most of bottom of text. Displacement of upper four lines appears to be due to some distortion ; it is assumed, on the basis of the available photograph, that line 4 of the text was unbroken. Dimensions : *c.* 16.5 x 4.7cm. (Figs. 5-6)

- 1 *beliloke*
li : wteli : p
keli : diro
h..w [
5 *2-3?] r.rete*
..] : am.ro
..] mlowi : d
..] : mlowi : b
..] eseni
10 *..] .tolowip*

- 11 ..] eḥoḥe : a
 ..] telowi :
 .. lw : at.
 qo : worbe : pe
- 15 debḥ. 1 ser
 .rq.an
 p. 1 p.rqo
].ne : wepide
].ni : kete
- 20 ..] i : wepy
] : a [.] .
]ye [?

Notes :

- line 1 : the reading of *beliloke* seems reasonably secure although signs 5-6 are partly obscured. This is a known title, but one of unknown significance. It appears quite frequently in titularies, for example that of *Maloton* from Karanog (REM 0277), and associated with *Amanap* (e.g. REM 0203, 0230, 0322).
- line 3 : reading can be securely reconstructed. Word divider after *pkeli* indistinct. Reading of *diro-* rather than *yiro-* clear.
- line 4 : only part of first letter preserved, but *ḥ* reading more likely than *e*. Second two letters lost but presence of *w* seems to confirm reconstruction of *diroḥetowi*. Beginning of next word lost.
- line 5 : first 2-3 letters lost, *r* secure, followed by lost letter and what is almost certainly a further *r*. Final *ete* seems most probable, cf. form of *te* in line 2. The construction of the formula suggests that we might expect the name of a deity + toponym in this part of the text.
- line 6 : first 2-3 letters lost. Initial *a* confirms reading of word divider before. Staining and folds have obscured the following letters, but *amero* is a possible reading. A long letter form such as *m* is likely, followed by an *e*, with a faded upper element. This title has known associations with the cult of *Amanap* (e.g. REM 0234) and on occasions specifically with that cult at Qasr Ibrim, appearing as such on a number of gravestones from Nag Gamus (Almagro 1965 : 226-230).
- line 7 : 2-3 letters are lost at the beginning of the line. The word divider is very faint, followed by *mlowi*. The final letter is almost certainly a *d*.
- lines 8-9 : the final *b* in line 8 may be part of *bnebeseni* ; the missing letters would fit the available space at the beginning of line 9.
- line 10 : the reading of the first letter is uncertain, a *b* or *s* seem most likely. The *-tolowi* is reasonably certain, the final *i* being very faint.
- line 11 : *eḥoḥe* or *esoḥe* may be possible.
- line 12 : *-telowi* is certain but there is insufficient space to insert *wyeki*, seen in other texts, at the start of the line.
- line 13 : the last two characters are very worn, a single dot suggests the presence of a *t*.

- line 14 : for *worbe*, see Buhen ostraca REM 1148.
 line 16 : the first character could be a *w*.
 line 17 : the first character could be an *l*.
 lines 18, 20 : the readings *wepid* and *wepy*, rather than *wekid* and *weky* seem secure.
 line 22 : an *e* after the *y* is possible.

QI72.11.14/8

Papyrus docket. Well preserved with only base incomplete. A hole cut though line 2 appears to predate the main text. Some faint traces of additional writing near the top suggest the docket was reused/rewritten. Text in black ink with 15 lines largely intact and traces of a further line of text at the base. Dimensions : 11 x 3,9cm. (Figs. 7-8)

- 1 *te. ti : w*
 te .. : pkeli :
 diroheto
 wi : amni : pb.
 5 *qo be*
 mkde : tmnete
 atritmne
 te : mlowidne
 to : mlowibne
 10 *beseni :*
 srbeyd
 hotiteye
 k.keyhek
 ye : bkese
 15 *mloteni :*
 ?]. [?

Notes :

- line 1 : traces of the initial letter are preserved, probably one which incorporates a horizontal stroke. The final *p* seems secure with traces of a partially erased letter below and to the left.
 line 2 : the initial *te* seems secure from the context, with sufficient space for *li* following. The *pkeli* is written around the cut hole in the papyrus.
 line 3 : while damaged, the reading of *diroheto* seems secure.
 line 4 : the second word seems most likely to be *amni* rather than *apni*, the papyrus being distorted here, misplacing the tail of the *n* to the right of the fold. The reading of the last 3 characters seems problematic. The *p* seems secure but the next two characters appear to be single slashes, possibly a *b* or an incomplete *y* or *r* ?

- line 5 : following the initial *qo*, the characters are confused, with some letters apparently having been scraped out. The first *b* seems secure followed by 1 or possibly 2 illegible characters.
- line 6 : the reading of *mkde* is uncertain but seems the most acceptable in view of the palaeography of this text. *Tmne*, apparently a place-name, is known from several texts (e.g. REM 1067/1, from Arminna). The name has been linked with a settlement at Gezira Dabarosa (FHN III : 808, 879), but this association remains speculative ; the limited occupation documented at the site (Hewes 1964 ; Lister 1967) appears to be of Ptolemaic date⁶.
- line 7 : following the *r*, which seems certain, the next character is confused, possibly corrected. An *i* or perhaps *e*, corrected, is possible. Claude Rilly points out this appears to be a rare reference to *Atri* (Hathor), otherwise found in REM 0015/1 (from Naqa) and possibly as *Atre-* in REM 0075/12, in the second occurrence followed by *Tmne* again. He also has suggested that *mkde* is a variant of *mkdi* "goddess", the 2 lines reading *mkde Tmnte, Atri Tmnte* - "the goddess in Tamane, Hathor in Tamane".
- line 10 : a reading of *beseni* is perhaps safer than *beyoni*.
- line 12 : personal names in this and the next line ?
- line 13 : a single dot after the initial *k* could be part of a word divider. After the second *k* the next character is incomplete, an *e* is more likely than a *t* or *l*.
- line 14 : after the first word divider, a *b* seems most probable.
- line 15 : the final complete line seems secure.
- line 16 : part of only one character is preserved in the final line.

QI76.2.15/8

Wooden tablet, text in black ink on two sides. Apparently near complete with 17 lines of text on each side ; quite well-preserved except for last lines which are imperfect. This reading is based on a poor quality handcopy and only a very tentative reading can be offered here, as a further illustration of the opening formulae. Dimensions : 14.1 x 6.6cm. Context : found below Structure X2-9, room 5.

- 1 *pesetoli : w*
 teli : pkeli :
 diroh.towi
 wos : p ete.e
- 5 *li...pt..*
 .te.temlo
 widnetomlowi
 bnebeseni
 soryepir

6. Comparable pottery, likely to date to the 3rd century BC, may be found in recently published material from Elephantine (Aston 1999 : 282ff).

- 10 *meseliwise*
.ḥideteni
..ḥ.ēpye
..esebe..e
..berēkp
 15 *.m.i : .teli*
.se : wese.
..pdekeli
..reke

Notes :

line 7 : this reading of the line seems near certain.

line 8 : the handcopy suggests *bnebeyoni* but in view of the other texts *bnebeseni* seems more likely.

QI84.1.23/3A

Small wooden board, broken at one corner and possibly at one end. Two large, and one small holes near the centre. 10 complete and parts of 8 lines of text in black ink on one side (not illustrated) and 11 complete and 8 partially preserved lines on the other side. Dimensions : 13.9 x 4.2cm. Context : 939 Plaza. Reg : 84/729. Divided to Cairo. (Fig. 9)

- 1 *tmedoyi :*
wteli pke
liyirohe
towipedem
 5 *ktketorli*
msarbli
se : pnetene
bolḥml..
sopyk : be
 10 *re..oneb*
lmkelḥ
twi..se
tdek [4-5 ?]
ne ak [4-5 ?]
 15 *ke.. [4-5 ?]*
wyi [4-5 ?]
te y [
y y [
lḥp [

Notes :

line 1 : initial *t* likely. Very faint word divider at end of line.

line 2 : initial *w* very faint but secure.

line 4 : initial *to* partially preserved.

line 5 : *tketorli* seems possible here but the locative form *tketorete* more appropriate ; the last signs are very uncertain. The Meroitic settlement at *Tketore* (found, for example, in REM 0129) has associations with the cult of Apedemak, and was probably located between the Third Cataract and Amara, perhaps at Kedurma (see Edwards 1995).

line 6 : *arbli-* is more likely than *perbli-*.

line 8 : the sign on the central split in the wood is almost certainly an *h*. There are very faint traces of a further sign at the end of the line.

line 9 : the first characters are most likely *so*, but a smudged *q* is possible. Traces of a character over the split.

line 12 : a final *se* reasonably secure.

line 13 : *tdek-* seems likely, although *tdep-* is possible.

line 15 : *kere-*, *keye-* possible.

line 18 : *y y* possible but other faded characters may be present.

QI84.2.16/2

Strip of light-coloured wood with two ends and possibly one side broken. Parts of 17 ? lines of text in black ink survive on one side and 15 ? lines on the other side. Dimensions : 11.5 x 3.7cm ; 0.9cm thick. Context : Structure 1000, Room 3, upper fill. Reg : 84/731. Divided to Cairo. (Fig. 10)

(r) 1 *mltems*
 yi : wte
 lipkeli :
 yirohe
 5 *towi amn*
 qerbe
 te : mleyi
 yni : bne.e
 seni : qe
 10 *rylqo*
 wi : aklt
 ptten.
 wtrohe
 te : hoke
 15 *qowi : a*
 seli : dke
 te : ked [2 ?]

(v) 1 *shre*
 lni : wlte
 ked : ye
 *k : w * r*
 5 *he : psi*
 tep : .tepe
 lowi : pno
 te : pten
 drpid
 10 *n.ete..*
 wkilise
 phnr
 [3 ?] kn
 ni : ase
 15 *n..lise*

Notes :

(recto)

line 1 : initial letter almost certainly *m* followed by *l* or *e*. There may be a further faded sign at the end of the line.

line 6 : first characters problematic but could be *q*.

line 7 : *mleyi* may be preferable to *melyi*. Here perhaps an alternative for *mlowi*.

line 15 : word divider uncertain but following initial *a* seems best reading.

line 16 : a possible word divider after the initial *te* very faint.

(verso)

line 6 : first 2 characters very uncertain. After word divider, unclear whether a character or smudge.

line 10 : line poorly written and final characters very uncertain.

line 15 : possibly 2 lost characters after the initial *n*.

Discussion

On the basis of these new texts, a few comments may be made on Millet's original discussion of the introductory formulae. The texts are listed in Table 1 with suggested reconstructions.

1) The first stiche he interpreted as containing a personal name + defined noun + personal name + (verb + singular object) + *lo-wi*.

With the addition of this new material, we can identify three elements in this first part of the formula :

(a) We can confirm the presence of both personal names and titles at the beginning of the text. The Arminna texts include three personal name : *beliyi*, *ptiyeseyi* and *sweyoyo* while the Ibrim texts include *tmedoyi*, *mltemsyi* as well as the titles + article *-li* : *beliloke-li* and *peseto-li*. As Claude Rilly has suggested to us, due to the apparent rarity of anthroponyms ending in *-yi*, it seems likely that the personal names terminate in *-ye* and have a suffix *-i*, perhaps a vocative. The lack of the *-i* suffix on the ostrakon AWES-1 marks it out as potentially different in form.

(b) The second two elements (*wтели pkeli*) appear to be two defined nouns and Millet's suggestion that we have here "letter" + a personal name (1977 : 318) cannot be sustained. Rather these two words are part of the formula itself, although in AWK.-6-1, lacking the article. The meaning of *wte*, known from a number of documents, still remains uncertain, although suggested meanings of "life" (Monneret de Villard 1937 : 101-103) or perhaps "strength/power" (Hofmann 1981 : 301-2, 319) appear acceptable. It appears here as some form of introductory invocation/benediction ; but also occurs in royal texts.

(c) With regard to the verbal construction, it becomes more certain that the root is *-irohe*, or similar, rather than *yirohe* and the alternations in its form represent prefixes : either *yi-* or *di-* in these cases. Millet suggested, "send" may be an acceptable hypothetical gloss for this verb (1977 : 319). Other instances of its use may be found on the offering table of Abaratoye from Tomas (REM 1088) as *yirohe-te-lo*, and as *p-rohe-ne* in REM 0103. It may also occur in REM 1174 as *a-rohe-te* and *bi-rohe-bto* (*bse-lo*) later in the text of the first Arminna ostrakon REM 1096. One hypothesis which might be entertained is that we are dealing here with pronominal prefixes ; it is perhaps worth recalling Millet's discussion, following Zyhlarz (1930), of a possible first person singular pronoun *ano*, latterly *yini* (1977 : 320-321). Unfortunately, in none of the other more fragmentary texts of this type from Qasr Ibrim are both the name/title and complete verb form preserved, although at least two other occurrences of *dirohetowi* have been identified⁷.

2) The second stiche of the formula as recognised by Millet includes the name of a deity, commonly with *mlowi*, in some cases with repetition (1977 : 319). In these new texts the formula is more varied and, as Claude Rilly has pointed out, the names of a deity/deities + a qualificative may be seen as a separate element of the formula ; the *mlowi* being part of the third stiche (see below). The names of several deities appear in these texts, commonly with a locative ; both Isis and Amanap appear in the new Arminna texts, and Isis, Apedemak (in *Tketore*), Hathor (in *Tmne*), Mash and Amun in the Ibrim examples. This variability in the selection of names must relate to the content of the texts.

3) The third hypothetical stiche : *yini bnebeseni* was only well-preserved in Millet's first Arminna ostrakon (REM 1096). These new texts show that *wyekitelowi* was not part of this element but rather we have two variants of a formula with *mlowi*: *mlowi yini: bnebeseni* and *mlowi dneto: mlowi bnebeseni*⁸ appearing in four of the new texts from Qasr Ibrim, but in neither of those from Arminna.

7. Examples may be found in unpublished texts QI.84.2.23/25-AG and QI.84.1.31/43.

8. We are again grateful to Claude Rilly for suggesting that in QI.84.2.16/2 *mleyi* may be seen as a variant of *mlowi*.

With regard to Millet's original suggestion that we may be dealing with "letters", these new texts suggest that more complex interpretations may be required. The ostrakon AWE.S-1 differs markedly in that the opening formula, which lacks the verbal complex, separates two personal names, the second being that of Abaratoye (*abrtoye*). This distinction suggests that this text may represent a substantially different form of document than the other examples. However, the presence of opening formula is still a significant and distinctive feature.

The various deities cited in the second element of the formula would suggest a more explicitly religious content for the texts, rather than simple epistolary forms of address. That several of the Ibrim examples (and other texts not included here) refer to a number of gods associated with different cult centres raises further questions concerning not only the character of the documents but also the role of Qasr Ibrim itself.

The results of recent excavations continue to suggest that Meroitic Qasr Ibrim was primarily a cult and pilgrimage centre, probably markedly different from most other settlements in Lower Nubia (Edwards 1994 ; 1998). As yet, very little evidence for Meroitic domestic occupation, as opposed to activity likely to be associated with the several temples of the site, has yet been identified. Such a role seems likely to have continued into the post-Meroitic period. As such, it is not unlikely that many of the abundant textual finds from the site may relate to such religious functions. We also have some indications that Qasr Ibrim was a religious centre with very widespread links. Some demotic letters (probably dating to the late first century BC) found at the site, but apparently originating in Egypt, relate to an oracle of Amun at Qasr Ibrim (Rose 1996 : 157 ; Zauzich 1999). These certainly raise the possibility that forms of cult-related "correspondence", for example requests for oracles, or their pronouncements, may be included amongst the heterogeneous corpus of Meroitic texts from the site.

With regard to the contextual associations of such texts, it is particularly interesting that another example from Sai island has recently come to light (REM 1236, see Geus 1996 : 80, top left). This was a small leather document recovered from a Meroitic burial, probably dating to the second or third century AD⁹. Unfortunately the first line of the text is largely lost, but we can confidently read or reconstruct the same formulaic introduction discussed here. Considering its context, it may be suggested to have been of "amuletic" purpose and is perhaps an important indicator of the general nature of the texts from Qasr Ibrim as well as the ostraca from Arminna and Tila.

Further detailed analysis of these and other texts from Qasr Ibrim clearly has great potential for adding to our knowledge of the Meroitic language and opening up new lines of enquiry. While the analysis presented here is necessarily quite superficial, it is hoped that other researchers may still find the publication of these few texts of value. We would like to thank Claude Rilly for all his advice and for alerting us to various errors in the original draft of this paper, all errors remaining are of course our own. The texts from Qasr Ibrim are published courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.

9. This occurrence of a leather document is most unusual and it is interesting to note that such a range of materials may be used for such texts. In the example from Sai, the choice of leather would appear consistent with a portable "amuletic" use of the text.

REM 1096	pñyeseyi: wteli: pkeli: yirohetowi:	wos: wos: mtwilisc:	młowj yni: bnebeşeni	wyękitełowi: mkepn: yibjik: we: ipbqoke: biñreyi: yekte: klmeş 1 : mleyi: yekte: krękre birohębio: bolmk.knłise : nld.. ?] lme. : .ps :
REM 1152 AWE S-1	antli: w[te]li: pkeli: yi] rohetowi: sweyoyo: a [...] wteli pkeli:	: d [.....m]wilisc: [...]wos: ęolñłisc	m[lowj yni: b]nebeseni:	[...]hote: bę. [...]keni: [...]dęw [...]y: [...]abrtoyc: me[...lpe]de 1 mihel[...]yelelewę[...]pięe
AWK 6-1	beliyi: wte pke: yirohetowi	mnp: wwi: alote bşo:		yholbio: kod: hrlw: hibręwi mte: yñeyekel: pępnete: hreketęqerk: qęslıwi: ptk: lñ: qđip [...]hile: [...]ę: ye[.]lqđineyi: pynibdne: mđdikitel: wđitek: bnte: dıbene: tidhękese: bobt: hñhęreño: dew...[.]lene: yeke.[...l]l
Q172.12.3/4	beliokeli: wteli: pkeli: diroh[eto]w[li]	...r.rete...: am.ro...:	młowi : d[neto]: młowi: b[ne]b[şeni]	.tolowip [...] eñohe : a [...] telowi: [...]lw : ağ. qo: worbe: pedębh. l ser rqa[n [...] p. l p.rqol[.]ne: wepidę [...] ni: kete . .] i: wepy [...]: a [.] . [...]ye
Q172.11.14/8	ęę. ti: wte[li]: pkeli: dıroh[etowi]:	arni: pę.qobę.be mkde: tmnete atri tmnete:	młowi dneto: młowi bnebeşeni :	srbeydñititeyek. kęyñekye: bñese: mloteni: ..
Q176.2.15/8	pesetoli: wteli: pkeli: diroh[etowi]	wos: pete.eli...pt.ıe.te	młowi dneto młowi bnebeşeni	şorypir męseliwışę.đideteni . . h.ęp ye.. eşębe...e.bęreķp.m.i: .telj.se: węşę...pđekeli..reke
Q184.1.23/3A	tmędoyi: wteli pkeli yirohetowi	pedemk tketori] mş ąrlısc:		pnetene bolñml..şopyk: here..ępę bımke]pñ twi..şę]değ [4-5?] ne ağ [....] ke.. [....]wyi [....]ley ly y]lđpl...
Q184.2.16/2	młemsiyi: wteli pkeli: yirohetowi	ann. eręę.te:	młeyi yni: bne]b[şeni:	qetyıqowi: aklıpten.wrohete: hokęqowi: aşeli: dkete ked [2?] Is hřelni: wtekeđ: yę.k: w * t hę: psi ęep: .tepe lowi: pñote: pñen đpıdm...te..wkılisc pñıñr [3?] kñpi: aşęñ. lışę

Table 1. Listing of texts with suggested reconstructions of formulaic elements

Abbreviations

REM = Leclant J., Heyler† A., Berger-el Naggar Cath., Carrier C. and Rilly C., *Répertoire d'Épigraphie Méroïtique, Vols. I-III*, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris 2000.

FHN III = Eide T., Hägg T., Pierce R.H. and Török L., *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum, Volume III*, Bergen 1998.

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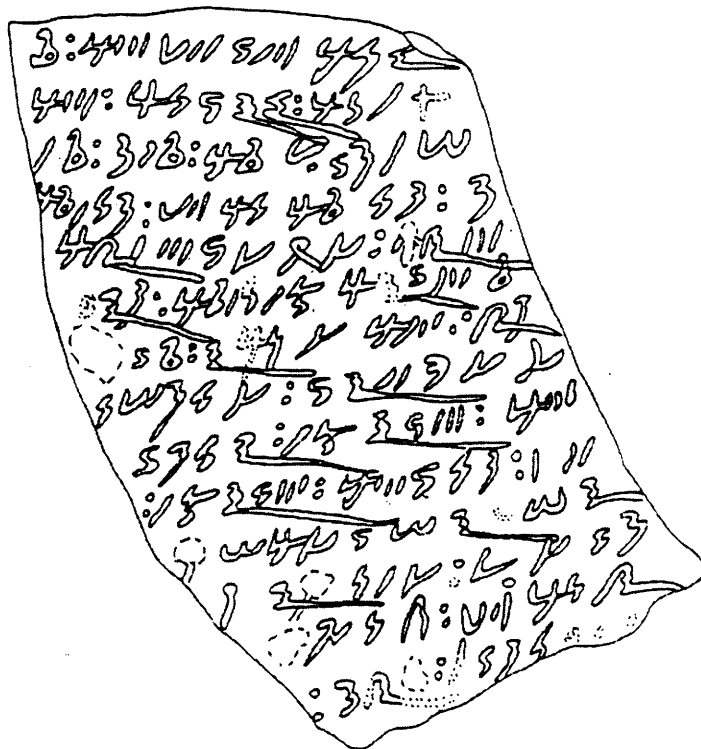


Figure 1
Handcopy of REM 1096 (after Trigger 1967, fig. 54.1)

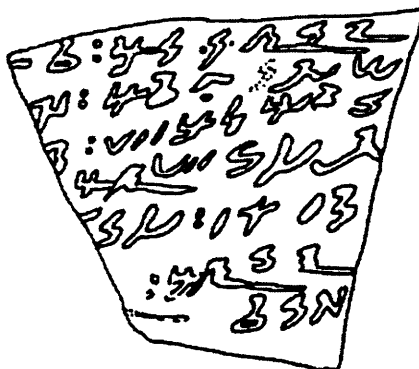


Figure 2
Handcopy of REM 1152

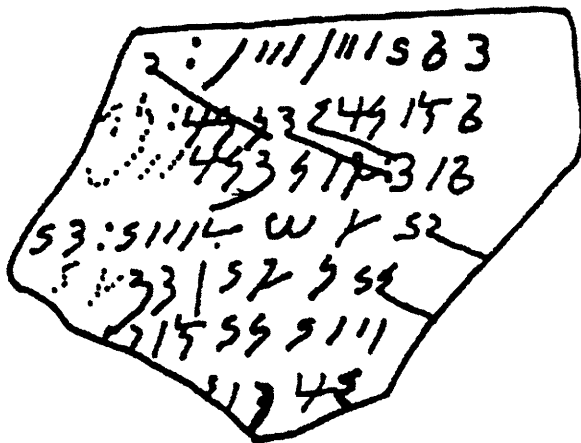


Figure 3
Facsimile drawing of ostracon AWE.S-1
(prepared by Reinhard Huber)

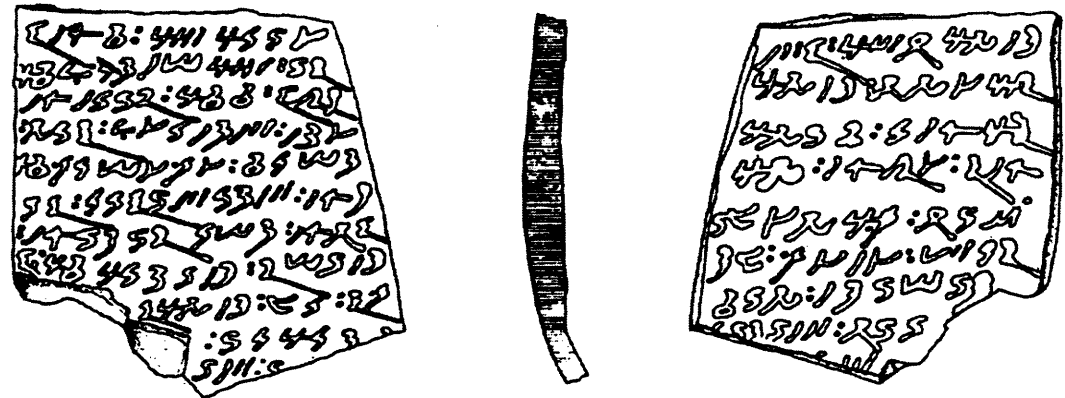


Figure 4
Facsimile drawing of ostracon AWK.6-1, observe left, reverse right
(prepared by Reinhard Huber)

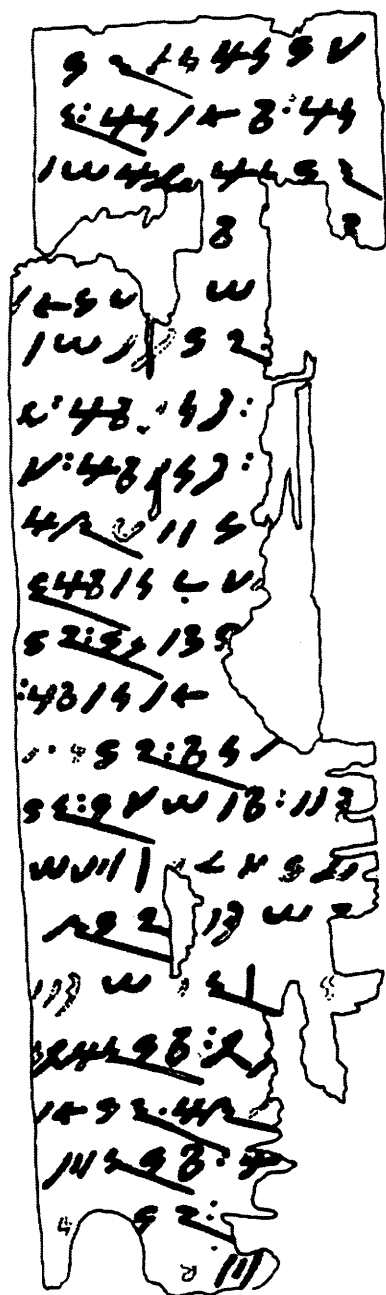


Figure 5
Facsimile of papyrus docket Q172.12.3/4

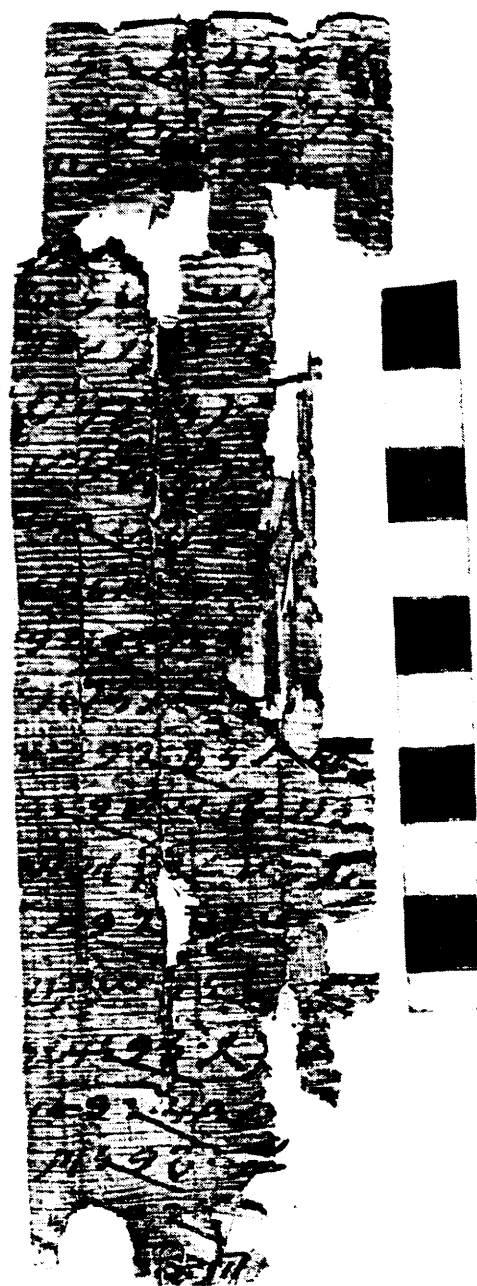


Figure 6
Photograph of papyrus docket Q172.12.3/4

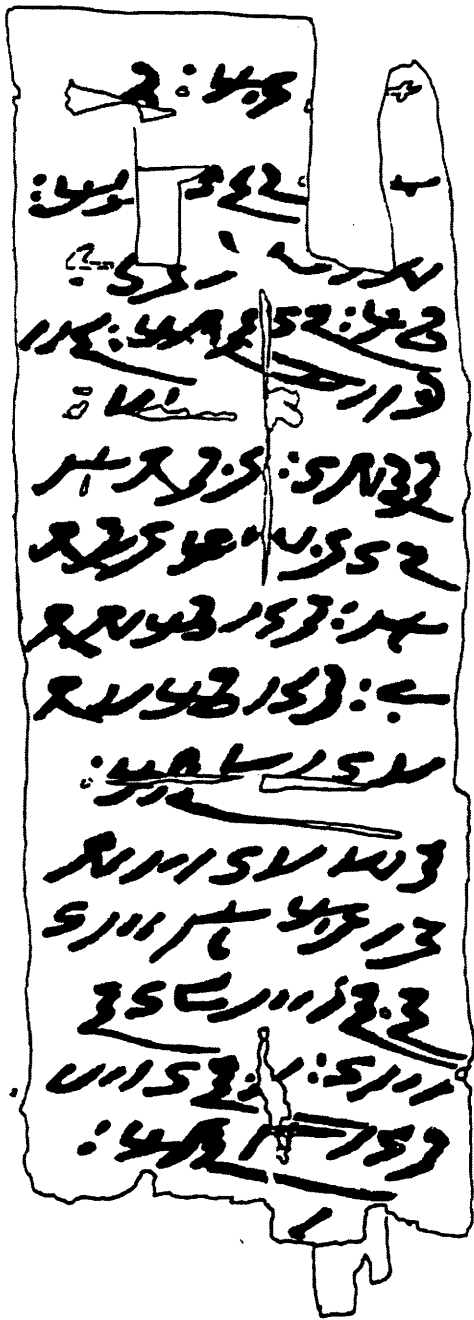


Figure 7
Facsimile of papyrus docket QI72.11.14/8

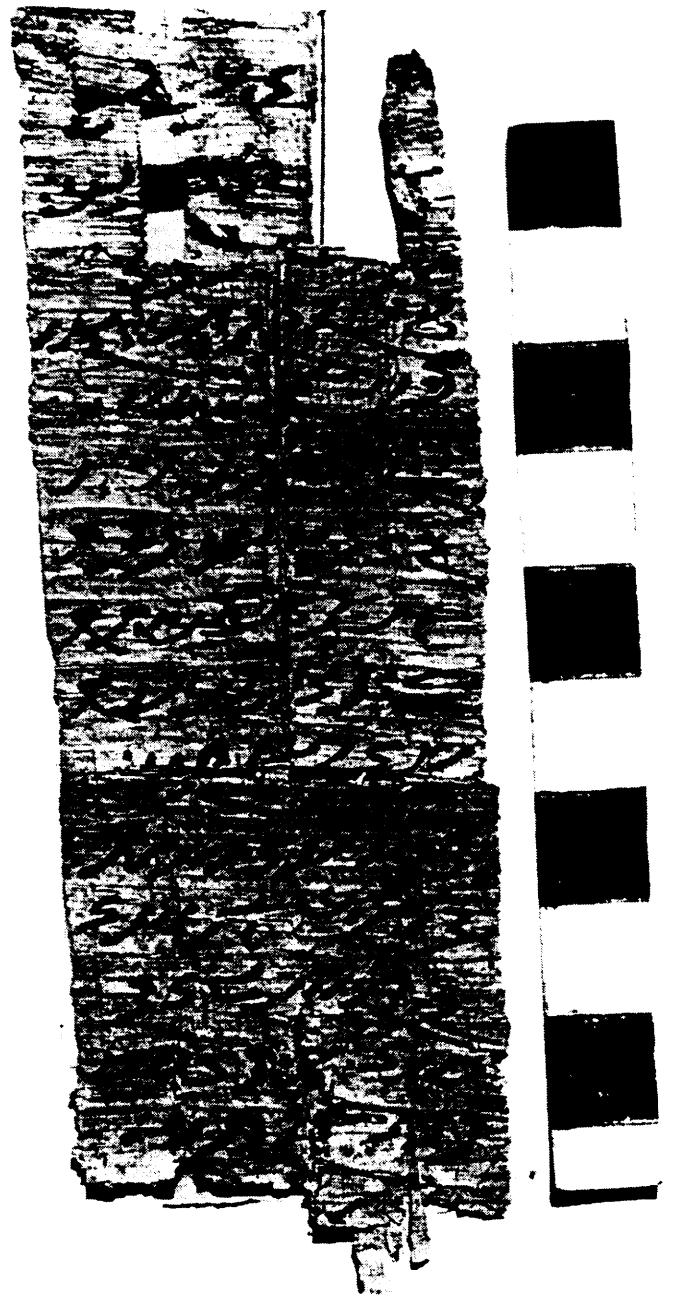


Figure 8
Photograph of papyrus docket QI72.11.14/8

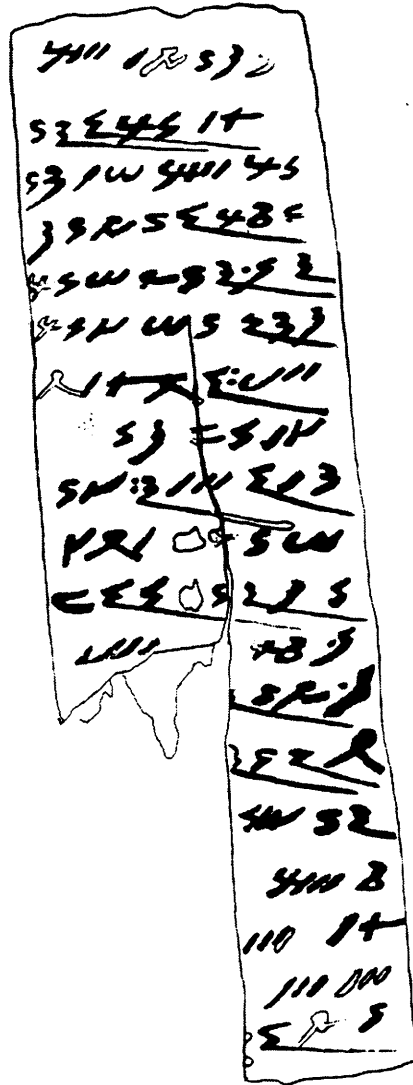


Figure 9
Wooden tablet Q184.1.23/3A (recto)

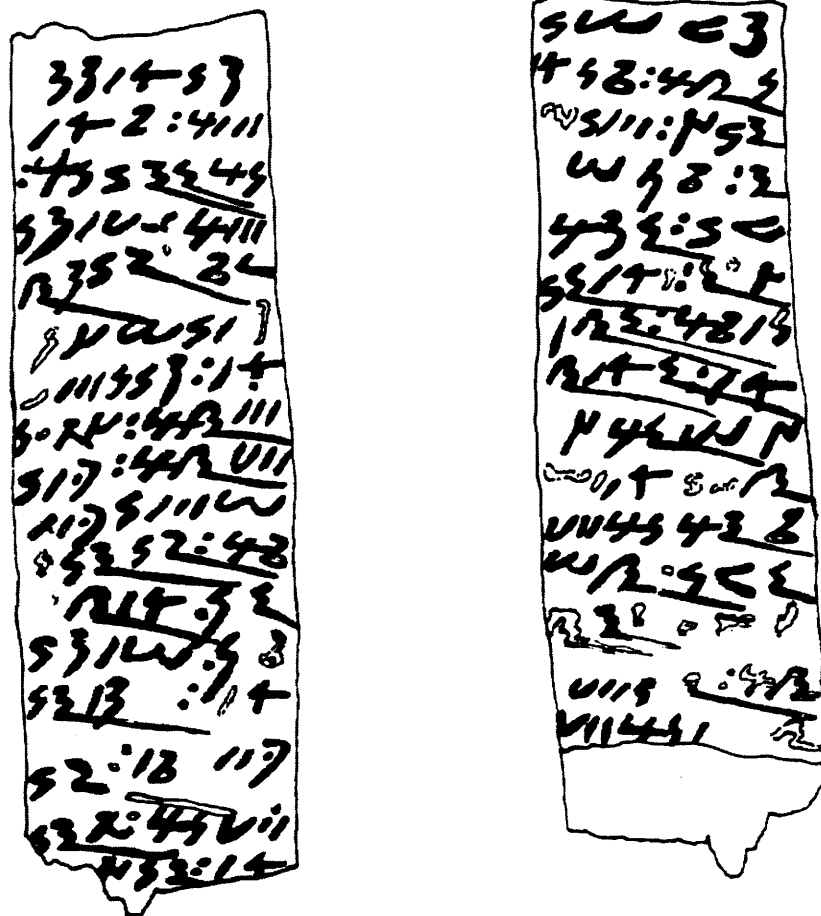


Figure 10
Wooden tablet Q184.2.16/2 (recto-left, verso-right)