

**Publication citation:** Quirke, SGJ (2016) One last frame of Middle Kingdom fragments. *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 23.  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/online\\_journals/bmsaes/issue\\_23.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/online_journals/bmsaes/issue_23.aspx)

# One last frame of Middle Kingdom fragments

*Stephen Quirke*

The fragments of more than one Middle Kingdom hieratic papyrus kept in a small box labelled 'Caton Thompson' (UC71095), as if from Gertrude Caton Thompson's Fayoum survey and excavation seasons of 1925-1927, are more plausibly identifiable by content as finds from one of the seasons directed by Flinders Petrie at Lahun. The fragments were conserved in 2003 by Renee Waltham, and their survival and accessibility are a double tribute to Renee and to Bridget Leach who trained her, enabling completion of the monumental task of conserving for Egyptology and a wider public the papyri from the Lahun 1889 seasons.

In 1999-2002, a government grant through the Designation Challenge Fund enabled the Petrie Museum Manager Sally MacDonald to provide on-line access to the entire collections of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, amounting to some 80,000 inventory numbers. For digitisation, all objects had to be registered, including miscellaneous manuscript fragments in the post-war storage cupboards that surround the limited display space. At the time, one small set of papyrus fragments was in a 9cm square box for 'ILFORD special lantern plates'. As conservation was not possible prior to our 2002 project deadline, I assigned the number UC71095 to the unsorted box contents and the box interior was photographed for the online museum database. In subsequent years, the National Manuscripts Conservation Fund, UCL Alumni and the Friends of the Petrie Museum generously funded conservation of manuscripts, building on the conservation surveys carried out since the 1990s by Bridget. In addition, Bridget had trained Renee Waltham in papyrus conservation, and Renee undertook the sorting, stabilising, cleaning, realigning of hundreds of fragments, including UC71095, and their secure mounting in 3mm thick frames of glass. In publishing an Egyptological introduction to this one frame, the last group of Middle Kingdom fragments to be rescued from perilous storage conditions, I hope to give an inkling of my gratitude to Bridget and Renee for their combined and united story of dedication and success.

A label 'Hureidha Irrigation' on the side of the box and a pencilled note on the lid 'Caton Thompson ...' indicate that the box itself had been used at some point for the 1937-1938 excavation directed by Gertrude Caton Thompson and Eva Gardner at Hurayda in Yemen (Caton Thompson 1944). Other untreated small finds in the Petrie Museum show how portable containers were regularly recycled for packaging on site, though space needs have dictated that few survived the museum processes of accessioning and storage or display. However, the contents of the box have no direct link with the Arabian Peninsula or the early Iron Age, and so the habit of recycling seems to have continued after the box returned to England. All manuscript fragments inside turn out to be Egyptian and late Middle Kingdom, most bearing hieratic, some cursive hieroglyphs. The

box also contained faience beads and a rosette, together with a small scarab-shaped seal-amulet, all originally wrapped in a scrap from the 'Agricultural section' of a newspaper. Caton Thompson herself may have used the box to rehouse finds from her earlier work, in which case the items could derive plausibly from her Fayoum excavation seasons of 1925-1927. It is also possible that post-WWII, Petrie Museum staff found it a convenient container for a vulnerable set of finds, without any connection to either the Hurayda excavation or its directors. As will be seen below, a different and more familiar provenance is suggested by the contents of the papyri as revealed by conservation. At least, though, the storage circumstances imply that the objects were found together; their modest appearance makes it unlikely that the group was purchased from an antiquities seller, and so they can be identified as finds from an excavation site, possibly even from one 'acquisition moment' or context.

Renee Waltham placed the fragments between two 30x30cm frames of 3mm glass. Newly accessible, the following individual items or groups can be identified (unless otherwise specified, with writing only on the side with horizontal fibres uppermost):

*Item 1*

Two fragments from perhaps one papyrus bearing parts of (i) four and (ii) seven horizontal lines of grain accounts in hieratic giving *heqat* measurements, organised with horizontal guide-lines at intervals of three lines.

*Item 2*

One fragment with writing on both sides, preserving an original edge at one vertical edge:

(a) Side with horizontal fibres uppermost, parts of two vertical lines in hieratic, preserving part of a letter formula, to left of a space without writing, so from the start of a letter: Line 1 [all] matters [of the lord, may he live, prosper and be healthy are well and sound...] Line 2 [...] Hetep-Se[n]usret [...]

(b) Side with vertical fibres uppermost, parts of two horizontal lines in hieratic:

Line 1 [...] -Senusret true [of voice]

Line 2 [...] district of Ankh-Amen-...

To the left is a thick vertical line in black, possibly an emphatic cartouche end after a cramped or truncated writing of the place-name Ankh-Amenemhat, followed by empty space to the original edge.

*Item 3*

One fragment with writing on both sides:

(a) Side with horizontal fibres uppermost, middle parts of three horizontal lines in hieratic, including in line 2 a verb of motion, and in line 3 the phrase 'the lord, may he live, prosper and be healthy', so from a letter.

(b) Side with vertical fibres uppermost, centre of the outside hieroglyph *nb* 'lord', as regularly placed on letters at about the middle of the reverse of the side of the papyrus bearing the main content.

*Item 4*

One fragment with parts of five horizontal lines in hieratic, including:

Line 2 the legs Gardiner Sign-list D54 preceded by *m ᶜr* or the particle *mt* 'see' addressed to a woman.

Line 3 *rmnyt* possibly with agricultural meaning 'district division (?)', or the military term 'battalion'.

Line 4 either the words *hr.s ᶜhᶜ.n* 'about it, and then', or the strong *h* followed by the word *sᶜhᶜ.n* 'raised'.

Line 5 perhaps a name beginning Sobek-[...] preceded by the egg-sign for filiation.

The fragment might be from a letter addressed to a woman (depending on the reading of line 2), or from an administrative, legal or literary document.

*Item 5*

A small fragment with remnants of signs from horizontal lines of hieratic on both sides, and one horizontal guide-line on the side with horizontal fibres uppermost.

*Item 6*

A small fragment with remains of three vertical lines of cursive hieroglyphs on the side with horizontal fibres uppermost, with horizontal framing-line above, and parts of two vertical framing-lines between lines 1-2 and 2-3. The word 'who/what is in' survives at the top of vertical line 2.

*Item 7*

Along the centre of the frame are mounted two larger and three smaller fragments from perhaps the same papyrus, alongside eight smaller fragments which may belong with this or one of the other groups/fragments on the frame. The larger two each bear parts of three vertical lines of cursive hieroglyphs, with thin vertical dividing-lines between lines 1-2 and 2-3; fragment (i) preserves the signs *mn bw* in the middle column, *mnḥ* (?) in the left-hand column, and fragment (ii) preserves in the right-hand column *n wn*, in the middle column *bw*. Fragment (ii) has a horizontal upper framing-line; the alignment is uncertain.

*Item 8*

The lower part of the frame contains three larger and three smaller fragments of similar texture and condition, bearing parts of vertical lines in hieratic, in red and black. The larger fragments are here numbered 1-3 in order of size. Guidelines from previous use of the papyrus sheet(s), presumably as an accountancy document, are visible between lines 1-2 and 4-5 of fragment 2, and between lines 1-2 of fragment 3. The repetition of the phrase *hm.k* on fragments 1-2, and on one of the three smaller fragments, reinforces the impression from the handwriting and physical features of the papyrus that the set can be assigned to a single

manuscript. The general appearance suggests a discursive and/or narrative literary composition, although the transcription is highly provisional, and published here only as an initial notice and invitation to Egyptian literary specialists.

Flinders Petrie directed the clearance of the late Middle Kingdom town-site at Lahun in spring and autumn 1889, and the Fayoumi work team brought to light a large number of mainly fragmentary papyri in both seasons (Griffith 1898; Collier and Quirke 2002-2006). In 1914 and 1919-1920 Petrie returned to the site with Guy Brunton, focusing on the pyramid of Senusret II and surrounding features but including some work at the town-site (Petrie and Brunton 1923). In 1914, another eight hieratic papyri, again mainly fragmentary, were found during excavations directed by Reginald Engelbach at the cemeteries and cemetery houses contemporary with the Lahun town-site across the fields at Haraga (Engelbach 1923). Together, the Lahun and Haraga documents constitute the Middle Kingdom papyrus collection of the Petrie Museum. Therefore, despite the label on the modern box used to store the papyri up to 2003, it is not so surprising that, on item 1, conservation has revealed place-names associated with Lahun: Hetep-Senusret, the likely name of the ancient town at the desert edge west of the modern town Lahun (Horváth 2009), and Ankh-Amenemhat, attested on accountancy documents and letters from the site (notably UC32182, on work at Ankh-Amenemhat in year 43 of Amenemhat III, Griffith 1898, 50, pl.18).

My own work on the Lahun papyri began with Mark Collier and with Bridget, when the late Barbara Adams, then curator of the Petrie Museum, secured funding for conservation, assessment and treatment of this part of the collection. Through an effective review of the sixty-five items selected by Frank Griffith for his outstanding edition (Griffith 1898), and of the hundreds of further items in another sixty-six glass frames, Bridget initiated a full-scale project over the next several years. We witnessed how she rescued a series of celebrated Egyptological manuscripts such as the Lahun gynaecological papyrus, the cycle of Hymns to Senusret III, the Tale of Horus and Seth, the Festival Rota of Dancers and Singers, and how she dedicated the same care and achieved the same success with any item, no matter how insignificant or unrewarding it might have looked at first glance. During this process, Barbara Adams relocated the series of the smallest unframed fragments, many in their original 1889 envelopes, as Griffith had left them in sorting, still with the 'lot' number assigned by Petrie.<sup>1</sup> Here Bridget showed another crucial talent, in her teaching ability, as she trained Renee Waltham in the specific arts and needs of papyrus conservation. Renee was then able to continue and complete the rescue work on the Lahun papyri, and launch her own rescue projects for the other papyrus and paper manuscript fragments in the collection, from New Kingdom Books of the Dead, to a consignment of Arabic and some Coptic and Greek documents from Bahnasa (Oxyrhynchus). To this range of material belongs UC71095, and I offer this initial assessment to both Renee and Bridget, as a token of my gratitude for their skills and for everything I learned from them over those years. Their work directly reconnects us with the diverse worlds of ancient writing in practice, and allows those worlds a new voice today.

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the numbering and sorting between Griffith, Petrie, and Percy Newberry, see Collier 2009.

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Fig. 1: Papyrus fragments UC71095 after conservation: side with horizontal fibres uppermost. Copyright Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.





Fig. 2: Papyrus fragments UC71095 after conservation: side with vertical fibres uppermost. Copyright Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.

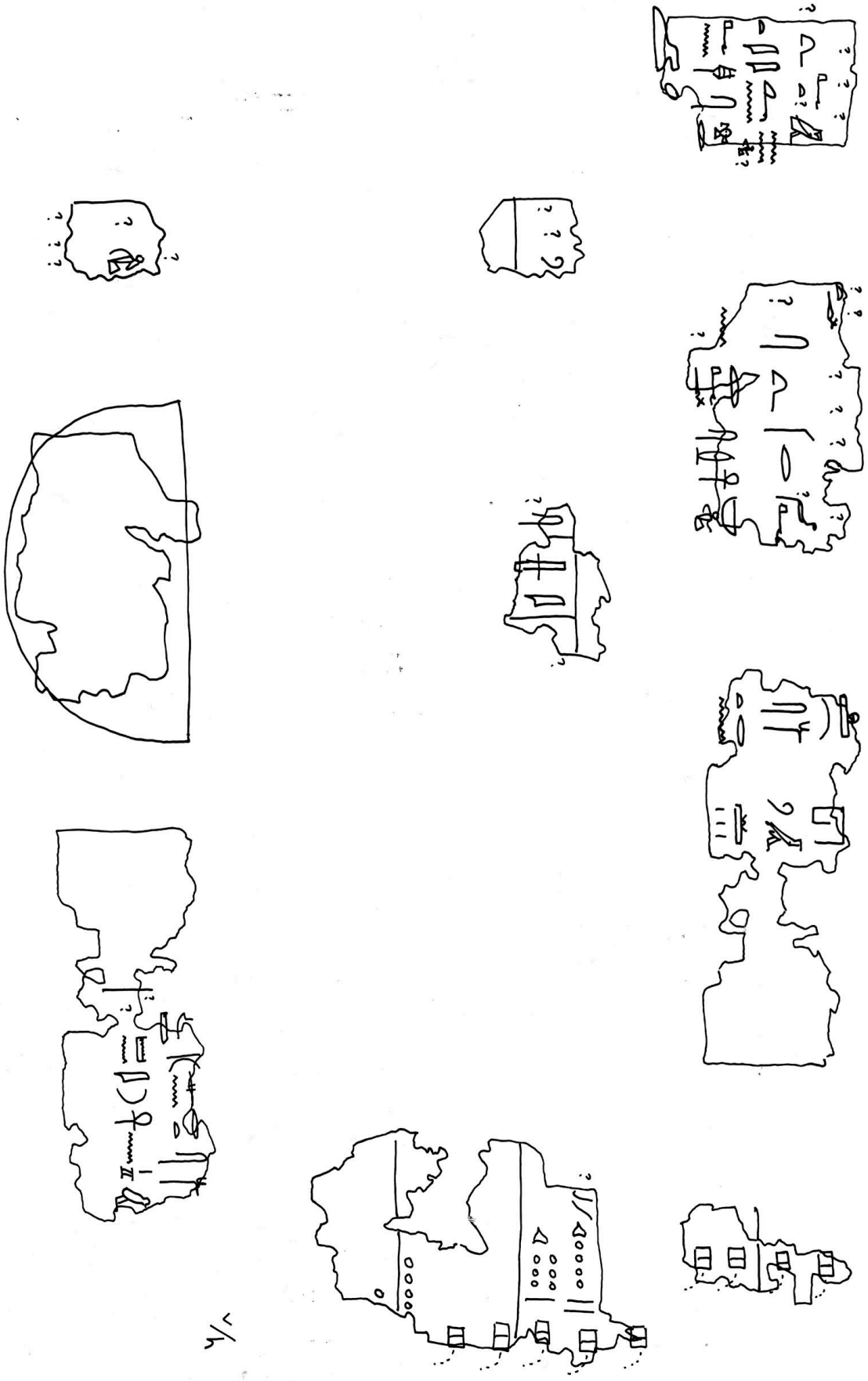


Fig. 3: Provisional transcription of UC71095, items 1-6.



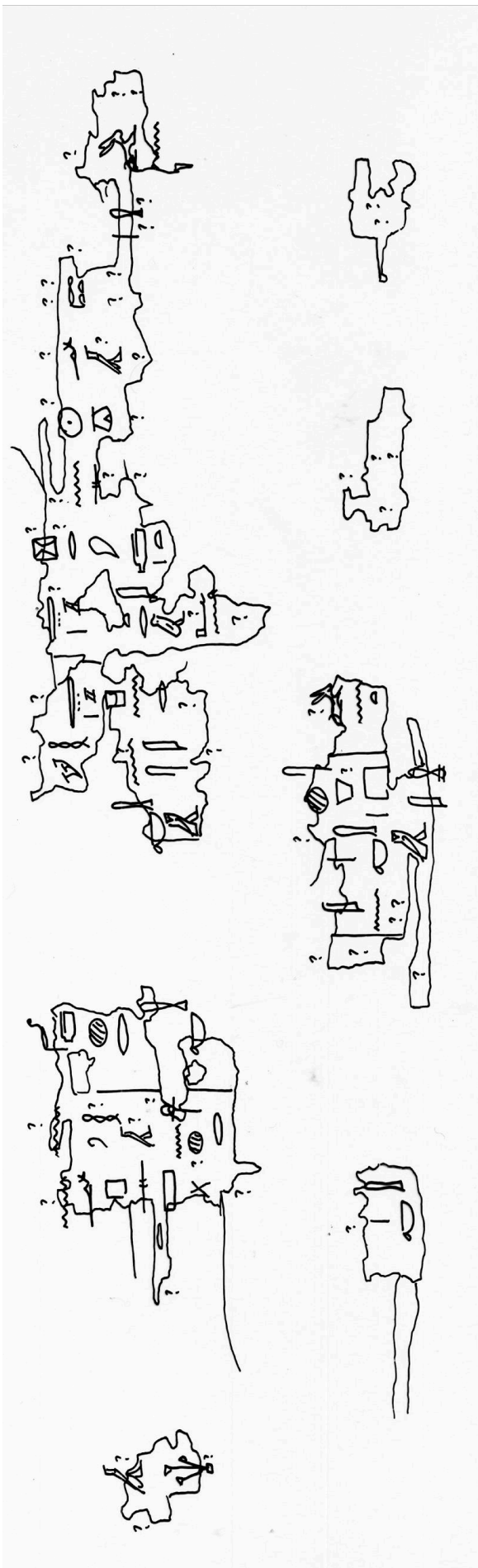


Fig. 4: Provisional transcription of UC71095, item 8.