

Edward F. Wente

In conjunction with the much publicized discovery of the Medinet Habu excavation records, which had supposedly been lost in Germany during World War II, Edward F. Wente has undertaken an examination of the twenty hieratic ostraca that were found in the Medinet Habu temple complex and are now housed in the Oriental Institute Museum. Although a number of important papyri are believed to have been unearthed during the last century in the area of Medinet Habu, it is remarkable that so few hieratic ostraca were discovered in the Oriental Institute's excavations at this site. During the Twentieth Dynasty Medinet Habu became the administrative center of western Thebes, and by the end of this dynasty the crew of workmen who prepared the royal tombs had moved from the village of Deir el-Medina into the more secure confines of the Medinet Habu enclosure wall. Most of the datable hieratic ostraca can be assigned to the last several reigns of the Ramesside Twentieth Dynasty.

One ostracon, however, seems to date from the reign of Ramesses III, whose mortuary temple was the largest edifice within the complex. Found not far north of the great pylon of the temple, this ostracon contains the beginning of a cordial letter from an archivist of the treasury of Amun to a lector priest. Among the later hieratic ostraca is a record of the delivery of fish by fishermen known from other published documents. Fish were the primary source of protein for the necropolis community. Other ostraca in the group indicate that the distribution of rations was still being made to the right and left halves of the crew as had been the practice at the village of Deir el-Medina. Wente had hoped that some of the ostraca might date from the time of the building of the mortuary temple and provide evidence for the organization of work, but none of the documents can be assigned to this period. Wente's translation and study of Ramesside royal stelae are now focused upon the material from the Twentieth Dynasty.

Having taught a course on texts from the Amarna period last autumn, Wente is preparing an article discussing aspects of Akhenaten's deity, the Aton. Generally in works treating Akhenaten's religious revolution, the Aton is considered a somewhat remote deity, revealed only to the king and merely having physical contact with commoners through his visibility as a radiant sun disk. In contrast to traditional deities, the Aton appears as a mute god, who does not speak in words. What Wente is examining are the human qualities of the Aton as expressed in texts from the tombs at Amarna and the consequences such terminology may have upon the commoner's relationship to the Aton.
