

The Journal of Egyptological Studies

VI (2023)

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**SOME OBSERVATIONS
CONCERNING THREE PROBLEMATIC PASSAGES
FROM PAP. PETERSBURG 1116 B, RECTO**

Mila Guerassimova

The first publication of the text was made by M. Golénischeff in „*Les papyrus hiératiques 1115, 1116 A et 1116 B de l'Ermitage impérial à Saint Pétersbourg*” in 1913. Before this complete edition, he published two articles with announcements about the discovery of the papyrus in „*Le papyrus N1 de Saint Pétersbourg*” – *ZÄS* 14 (1876), 107; *4 Lettre de M. Golénischeff sur ses dernières découvertes* – *RT* 15 (1893), 88. The first translation was made by Golénischeff alongside the publication, followed by Alan Gardiner in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* one year later, in 1914.

Papyrus Petersburg 1116 B is dated back to the XVIII Dynasty. Parts of the text have been found on total of 19 ostraca,²³³ (XIX-XX Dynasty) and two writing boards: Kairo 25224 and Brit. Mus. 5647, (XVIII Dynasty).

The purpose of this paper is to provide detailed and meaningful grammatical interpretation of three obscure and difficult passages from the text on pap. Petersburg 1116 B, known as the „Prophecy of Neferty”. A wide range of previous translations has been closely examined and used for the research in order to ease the understanding, and thus be as comprehensive as possible for the reader.²³⁴

The narrative takes place during the reign of King Sneferu, founder of the Fourth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, while the prophecy itself „shows” us the First Intermediate period and the succession of King Amenemhat I, the founder of Dynasty XII.

A lector-priest of the East, called Neferty,²³⁵ is recommended to the King because of his wisdom and excellence. He prophecies a time of destruction and

²³³ The full list is: Liverpool 13624 M; Petrie 38; Deir el-Medinah 1074; Deir el-Medinah 1182; Deir el-Medinah 1183; Deir el-Medinah 1184; Deir el-Medinah 1185; Deir el-Medinah 1186; Deir el-Medinah 1187; Deir el-Medinah 1188; Deir el-Medinah 1189; Brit. Mus. 5627; Turin; Michailides 9; Gardiner 326; Gardiner 331; Gardiner 371; Gardiner 372; Vandier; The last three are not published.

²³⁴ This paper follows the lines, numeration and hieroglyphs from W. Helck. *Die Prophezeiung des Nfr.tj*. Wiesbaden 1970.

²³⁵ Interestingly, Neferty is mentioned in the Chester Beatty Sage List and described as *bw hpr m h3w n.n mi Nfr.tj* (CB 3.5-7).

trouble ahead, a dark world filled with injustices and misfortunes, so unworthy of *maat* that the Gods have separated (*iwd*) themselves from the people. Egypt will be overrun by foreigners from the East *iw ʿ3mw r h3.t r Kmt*, the land is destroyed *hd.(w) t3 pn nn mhj hr.f*, the people are unhappy, deprived of sleep *tw r snb kdd m ir.tj*, they turn against each other, even the son kills his father *s hr sm3 it.f* while no one cares *kʿh.f s3.f*. Every sentence is full of pain and sadness for the glorious past. The changes that occurred as a result of the First Intermediate period, are expressed in a powerful way through repetitions and description of opposites. But eventually a saviour will come, who will bring order back to Egypt:²³⁶

niswt pw r ij.t n rsj ʿImnj m3ʿ-ḥrw rn.f
s3 ḥmt pw n t3-stj ms pw n ḥn-Nḥn
iw.f r šsp ḥdt iw.f r wts dšrt
iw.f sm3 šhm.tj iw.f r štp.(w) hr šth m mr.wt.sn

*A king will come from the South, Ameny is his name,
 son of a woman from Ta-setj, child of Upper Egypt.*

*He shall seize the White Crown, he shall take the Red Crown
 and unite the Two Powerful Ones. He will pacify Horus and Seth with what they love.*

The first passage of interest is where Neferty asks the King if he would like to listen about the present²³⁷ or the future.²³⁸ The ensued answer from the King tells us, in an intriguing way, something important about the Ancient Egyptian concept and understanding of time. Both lines are equally problematic and therefore a very detailed explanation is given to the reader. Let us take a closer look at the grammatical structure and meaning of these sentences.²³⁹

Pet. 4

in iw.(s) m hpr.t in iw.(s) m hpr.tj.sj itj ʿnh wd3 snb nb.j

About what is happening or what will happen, my sovereign Lord?

²³⁶ Lines P58-60.

²³⁷ Below, I have provided a very detailed study of why the correct translation and understanding must be *present*, not *past*.

²³⁸ We must make note that although Neferty's words are written as a prophecy, they more likely describe contemporary or past events.

²³⁹ Lines P14-15.

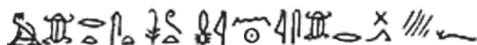
“of things past” (Gardiner 1914, 102)²⁴³
 “of what has happened” (Erman 1971, 112)²⁴⁴, (Lichtheim 1976, 140)²⁴⁵,
 (Wilson 1950, 444)²⁴⁶, (Parkinson 1997, 135)²⁴⁷
 “something that happened” (Shupak 2002, 107)²⁴⁸
 “what has come to pass” (Simpson 2003, 215)²⁴⁹
 “о прошедшем” (Korostovzev 1961, 47)²⁵⁰

A. L. Vassoevich²⁵¹ writes that *hpr.t* could be understood as *Part. Act. Perf.* or as *Part. Act. Praes.* He adds that a new translation is needed, namely „должно это быть из настоящего или из будущего.”²⁵² From the aforementioned translations becomes clear that most authors see *hpr.t* as a perfect passive participle but *hpr.t* could be:

what has happened – a **perfect passive participle past**
what is happening – a **perfect active participle present**

The idea behind the next line actually demands a different translation for this sentence, rather than the widely accepted “*what has happened.*”

Now, let us take a closer look at the King’s answer:



(t)m *hpr.tj.sj swt min is hpr.(w) sw3.(w) hr:f*

„No, about what will happen, for today passes through itself and is past.”(lit.)

²⁴³ A. Gardiner. *New Literary Works from Ancient Egypt: II. Pap. Petersburg 1116 B, recto.* *JEA* 2 (1914), 101-105.

²⁴⁴ A. Erman. *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians.* Translated into English by A. M. Blackman. New York 1971.

²⁴⁵ M. Lichtheim. *Ancient Egyptian Literature. Vol.1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms.* California 1976.

²⁴⁶ J. Pritchard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Princeton 1950.

²⁴⁷ R. Parkinson. *The Tale of Sinuhe and other Ancient Egyptian Poems.* Oxford 1997.

²⁴⁸ N. Shupak. *The Context of Scripture Vol I,* Leiden 2002.

²⁴⁹ W. Simpson. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry.* Yale 2003.

²⁵⁰ М. Коростовцев. Египетский Иератический папирус №1116 Государственного Эрмитажа (Пророчество Неферти). *КСИНА* 44 (1961).

²⁵¹ А. Л. Вассоевич. Духовный мир народов классического Востока. «Алетья».1998, 422.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 422.

All participles, including the *sdm.tj.fj* form, are negated with the negative verb *tm* - G. Gr. §397.2 so in the text instead of *m* we should have *tm*. Also, in place of the correct *hpr.tj.sj*, is written *hpr.tj.st*, where in G.Gr. §364, Gardiner explains the structure of the *sdm.tj.fj* form and points out that the *tj.st* ending is “rare and perhaps faulty”.

swt is an enclitic particle, which is “used in order to mark a contrast” G.Gr. §254.

hpr.(w) and *sw3.(w)* – old perfective G. Gr. §309.

For the sake of better understanding, I will quote five translations of this problematic part:

“today (a thing) happens and is past” (Gardiner 1914, 102)

“as soon as today is here, it is passed over” (Lichtheim 1976, 140)

“for today happens and then it is passed by” (Parkinson 1997, 135)

“it is today and the passing of it, already happens” (Shupak 2002, 107)

“today has already occurred and is past and gone” (Simpson 2003, 215)

It is imperative to note that the King wishes to hear about the *future* because *today* is already *gone* - *hpr.(w) sw3.(w) hr.f*. In his answer he opposes the future to the present, not to the past! - „противопоставляет будущему не прошедшее, а настоящее (сегодня)”.²⁵³

Because of all that, it makes more sense to translate *hpr.t* as *present*, not past. A. L. Vassoevich explains that „будущее рассматривалось как реальное послесуществование, прошлое как реальное предсуществование, а настоящее, т.е. „сегодня”, как нечто, что „совершается, минуя себя”.²⁵⁴ Hence, the idea behind this sentence is to show that the present disappears before we can even sense it.

We can say that „now” does not seem to exist, because imperceptibly, what is now *present* becomes a thing of the *past*.

The interpretation of the next chosen passage is even more difficult and obscure. We are interested in line P20. For anyone who is unfamiliar with the text, here is the context:

Rt. ²⁰ 

dd.f hws ib.j rmj.k t3 pn š3c.n.k im.f

He said: „Stir my heart, mourn this land – you have sprung from it.

²⁵³ А. Л. Вассоевич. Духовный мир народов классического Востока. „Алетейя” 1998, 422.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 423.

Pet.

gr m iwḥ

The silent is an offender

Pet.

mk wn dd.tj r.f m (s)trjt

when it will be spoken about with fear;

Pet.

mk r.f wn wr m pth (m t3) š3̣.n.k im t3

then the great one was cast to the ground - you originated from it.

ḥwsj here is an imperative, (“*stir heart*” F.D. 186); Neferty’s prophecy is delivered directly to the king, but addresses “*my heart*” – it is an interior monologue.²⁵⁵ *š3̣* means “*begin, originate, be the 1st to do s’thing* (F.D. 261); *š3̣.n.k* is the form *sdm.n.f*. As for the use of *mk*, Lichtheim has a special article²⁵⁶ about the particle, where she explains that „*since it invites attention, is always emphasizing, the iteration of mk links sentences or clauses which, taken together, describe a situation or make a point.*”

Our sentence of interest is *gr m iwḥ*. It has a lot of interpretations and needs further commentary.

The meaning of the word *gr* is “*be silent, be quiet, be still; silence*” (F.D. 290) and *iwḥ* is “*moisten; water field-plots; inject a liquid remedy*” (F.D. 14). Berlin dictionary gives the definition “*benetzen, bewässern.*” (WB I, 57) There is also a variation with the spelling meaning: „*eine böse Handlung: vernichten.*” For examples with *iwḥ*, Gardiner²⁵⁷ leads us to ZÄS 26 (1888), 84 but in vain, because the

²⁵⁵ A. Loprieno. *Ancient Egyptian Literature, History and Forms*. New York.1996, 146.

²⁵⁶ M. Lichtheim. “On the Iterative use of the Particle *mk*.” *JNES* 30 (1971), 69-72.

²⁵⁷ A. Gardiner. *New Literary Works from Ancient Egypt: II*. Pap. Petersburg 1116 B, recto. *JEA* 2 (1914), 103, n.4

spelling does not correspond to ours and there is not one case that could fit properly in the context.

Below, I have provided eleven translations of this obscure line:

- „Tais-toi, ne déborde pas” (Golénischeff 1913, 6) => *gr* as an imperative.
 “He who is silent is a transgressor” (Gardiner 1914, 103) => *gr* as a participle.
 “To be silent is repression” (Wilson 1950, 445) => *gr* as a verb, *iwḥ* noun.
 “Молчащий подобен преступнику...” (Korostovzev 1961, 47) => *gr* as a participle.
 “denn Schweigen wäre Begünstigung” (Helk 1970, 18) => *gr* as a noun.
 “When there is silence before evil...” (Lichteim 1976, 140) => *gr* as a noun.
 “For silence is what overwhelms” (Parkinson 1997, 135) => *gr* as a noun.
 “Le silence est comme l’inondation” (Fermat 1999, 222) => *gr* as a noun.
 “He who is silent is a wrongdoer” (Shupak 2002, 108) => *gr* as a participle, *iw²⁵⁸* instead of *iwḥ*
 “Falsehood is as the flood” (Simpson 2003, 216) => used *grg*,²⁵⁹ instead of *gr*; noun.
 “Be calm, do not be uncontrolled” (E. Guerry, B. Ockinga 2008, 310)²⁶⁰ => *gr* as an imperative, *m iwḥ* negative imperative

Therefore, from the translations we can summarize:

- gr*: 1. silent/silence 2. falsehood 3. calm
iwḥ: 1. transgressor 2. evil 3. repression 4. flood 5. wrongdoer 6. uncontrolled

In the didactic literature, praise is given to the man who is silent, quiet and the one who listens. The silent (*grw*) is the personification of the „ideal man”, the one who follows the principles of *maat*.²⁶¹ But there are moments where “*there is condemnation of silence, when silence implies non-performance of positive acts.*”²⁶² We must make note that the whole text of the prophecy is full of deviant descriptions. Everything is turned upside down, things are not as they used to be, nothing is what you would normally expect. Having that thought in mind, we could well see that *being silent* easily becomes a negative thing and fits in this context.

²⁵⁸ F.D. 12 “*wrongdoing, injustice*”. However, the determinative „bird G 37” is missing.

²⁵⁹ In one of the following sentences we have *grg* and Simpson believes that here the word is mistaken.

²⁶⁰ E. Guerry, B. Ockinga. Neferty P20 Reconsidered. *LingAeg* 16. 2008, 307-310.

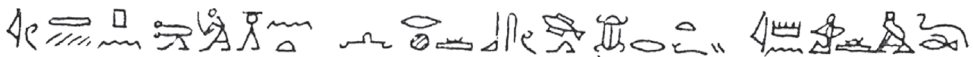
²⁶¹ E. Бузов. Пътят на живота. Учението на древноегипетските мъдречи. „Изток-Запад” 2011, 226, бел. 14.

²⁶² N. Shupak. *Where can wisdom be found? The Sage’s Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature*. University Press Fribourg Switzerland. 1993, 150-1.

iwh has much more variants in terms of interpretation. Its main meaning is related to „moisten“, but in only two of the given translations this connection was recognized - „is as the flood“ (Simpson 2003) and „est comme l'inondation“ (Fermat 1999). According to Helck, *iwh* means „inundate“, but here could be used the metaphorical „advantage, encouragement“ (*begünstigung*). We can probably assume that because of the *fear* of speaking in the next sentence (*dd.tj r.f m (s)trjt*), to be *silent* becomes convenient and therefore is no longer a virtue.

The common thing amongst almost all translations is that they give a negative connotation to the sentence. The ones with a positive meaning are the translations given by Golénischeff (1913) and E. Guerry, B. Ockinga (2008). They argue that Neferty urges his heart not to panic „be calm, do not be uncontrolled“ in the face of the terrible state of the land.²⁶³ However, in view of the whole passage and context of a gloomy world, where nothing is what it used to be, I believe that a translation with negative connotation is more suited.

Lastly, let us examine the following interesting lines:²⁶⁴



iw t3 pn r it-t-in.t n rh bsw hpr.tj.fj imn.w m dd

This land is disturbed – the result which will happen is not known.
It is hidden in the speaking,



ptr sdm hr id.(w) iw gr hft-hr

seeing and listening from the deaf. The silent is at the front.

itj has the meaning of „take away, carry off“ (F.D.34) and in combination with *in.t* we find this very example, defined as „this land wavers.“ The phrase has numerous translations:

“in perturbation” (Gardiner 1914, 104)

“is taken away and added to” (Erman 1971, 113)

²⁶³ They explain that this injunction needs to be seen in the light of the conclusion of the text, where a resolution of the problems is foretold in the coming of the new King. E. Guerry, B. Ockinga. Neferty P20 Reconsidered. LingAeg 16. 2008.

²⁶⁴ P37-38.

“is to-and-fro” (Lichtheim 1976, 141; Parkinson 1997, 136)

“is brought-and-taken” (Wilson 1950, 445)

“is seized and recovered” (Shupak 2002, 108)

“is in turmoil” (Simpson 2003, 217)

“эта в смятении” (Korostovzev 1961, 48)

The word *bsw* which is translated as *“result, consequence”* (F.D. 84) is used only in this text.

n rh bsw – passive sdm.f: B. Gunn²⁶⁵ explains that often with *rh* is used a form with *past* tense which, however, is translated as *present*, for example, instead “he has not been known” – “he is not known”. Therefore, the sentence is translated as *“the result which will come about is unknown.”*²⁶⁶

The next part is particularly difficult, because of the numerous grammatically correct possibilities. According to Korostovtsev, all of the translations are unsatisfactory and even guesswork, *“догадками, а не переводами.”*²⁶⁷ Gardiner’s translation is full of question marks: *„Hidden (?) seeing (?), hearing (?). Men are deaf (?), silence is before (men’s) faces (?)”*. Simpson, too, is quite uncertain in his translation: *„...is concealed in my words, but sight and hearing are dead. Only silence abounds?”*

We can reduce all translations to four different options:

OPTION 1

...is hidden from speech, sight or hearing. The face is deaf for silence confronts.

From this translation we understand that *dd*, *ptr* and *sdm* are perceived as *nouns*; *hr* here is translated as *face*; *id.(w)* – *old perfective* G.Gr. §309; *gr* as a noun – *silence*. Moreover, to accommodate this meaning, the sentences are to be separated as follows:

1. *inn m dd ptr sdm.* 2. *hr id.(w)* 3. *iw gr hft-hr*

This option fits Wilson’s translation²⁶⁸.

²⁶⁵ B. Gunn. *Studies in Egyptian Syntax*. Paris 1924, 131.

²⁶⁶ Chapter XV *n sdm.f* Passive in Middle Egyptian.

²⁶⁷ М. Коростовцев. Египетский Иератический папирус №1116 Государственного Эрмитажа (Пророчество Неферти). *КСИНА 44 (1961)*, 55.

²⁶⁸ J. Pritchard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton 1950, 445.

OPTION 2

..according as one says: "When sight and hearing fail the mute leads."

dd, *ptr* and *sdm* again nouns; *ptr* and *sdm* are divided in meaning by *dd*; *gr* as participle – silent one. Thus, the sentences are separated:

1. *imn m dd* 2. *ptr sdm hr id.(w)* 3. *iw gr hft-hr*

Lichtheim accepts this interpretation and explains that *m dd* is likely to denote that a proverb is being quoted. In her opinion *ptr* „can hardly be the near-meaningless „behold” and is more likely to be the infinitive of „to see”.²⁶⁹ Furthermore, she adds that the proverb might be similar to „among the blind the one-eyed is king.”

OPTION 3

..like the saying: „See how the hearer is deaf! The mute takes the lead”

ptr with the meaning of “behold” - imperative; *sdm* and *gr* are participles; Divided in meaning:

1. *imn m dd* 2. *ptr sdm hr id.(w)* 3. *iw gr hft-hr*

This is the understanding of the sentence according to Parkinson²⁷⁰ and Shupak.²⁷¹

OPTION 4

...is hidden in the saying: „Behold! Listen! The silence is in front of me”

ptr and *sdm* here are imperatives; *hr idw* has been removed from the translation and were perceived as an error.²⁷² He also suggests that after *hft-hr* there is a missed suffix pronoun first-person singular *j*.

²⁶⁹ M. Lichtheim. *Ancient Egyptian Literature. Vol.1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. California 1976, 144, n.8.

²⁷⁰ R. Parkinson. *The Tale of Sinuhe and other Ancient Egyptian Poems*. Oxford 1997, 136.

²⁷¹ N. Shupak. *The Context of Scripture Vol I*, Leiden 2002, 108.

²⁷² For no good reason whatsoever.

Separated:

1. *imn m dd* 2. *ptr sdm* 3. *iw gr hft-hr:(j)*

This is the suggestion of Korostovzev²⁷³ – in my opinion, the least possible option.

Regardless of the various grammatical options, the point of the passage is that the one who should *hear* and *see* is *deaf*, and therefore the result will remain hidden from him.

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²⁷³ М. Коростовцев. Египетский Иератический папирус № 1116 Государственного Эрмитажа (Пророчество Неферти). *КСИНА 44* (1961), 48.

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