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Eye-paint, orpiment, and jaundice: Demystifying a hitherto unknown hieratic sign in an Berlin treatise on ophthalmology

pBerlin P. 15339 provides a broad range of eye recipes from the Late New Kingdom including instances of two hitherto undocumented hieratic signs. One of them is a variant of child (A17) + knife (T30) for *m:sdm.t* – “galena”, the second one is a composite sign of the human eye (D4), crossed by a slash and determined by the grain of sand (N33) on plural strokes. Despite the recipe’s titles missing, it is argued that we are confronted with a yellow(ish) mineral. The most likely candidate for this ingredient seems to be *knj.w* – “orpiment”, well-known from MK stelae and NK tomb paintings. The pharmaceutical connection between eye-paint and orpiment finds an etiological explanation in a rather unexpected place, and this is the contendings of Thoth and Seth in pJumilhac copied at some point in the late Ptolemaic Period. A lexicographical approach of the root *knj* – “yellow(ish)” may help explain the Ebers recipe no. 416 and its multi-colored antidotes to fight *knj.t*, another clear case of chromoanalogical proceeding in Egyptian pharmacopeia. A yellow(ish) disfigurement on the sclera of the eyes may indicate one of the first symptoms of *knj.t* – “jaundice”.