

The Shipwrecked Sailor: The Serpent Left Alone

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A shipwrecked survivor finds an island ruled by a giant serpent. The creature's own account of catastrophe turns a frightening encounter into an ancient story about survival, grief and uncertain reassurance.

STATUS	Middle Kingdom literary tale preserved on papyrus; mythical island and serpent
CLASSIFICATION	STR
MATERIAL	Ancient Egypt; an unnamed island in the tale
DISPOSITION	PUBLIC / SOURCED STORY
CATEGORY	Strange Files
RECORD TYPE	Ancient stories
STORY HISTORY	A surviving late Middle Kingdom papyrus

THE ACCOUNT

A sailor survives a wreck and reaches an island where the ruler is a giant serpent. The stranger's size promises danger, but the tale changes as the creature begins to speak. It once belonged to a family of serpents until a falling star destroyed the others. The human castaway is listening to another survivor. Rescue eventually comes for the sailor, who carries the encounter back into the larger story being told.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor survives on Papyrus Hermitage 1115, which UCL identifies as a late Middle Kingdom manuscript. Its composition date is not fixed simply by the age of that copy. The adventure sits inside a framing narrative: a follower tries to reassure a superior returning from an unsuccessful expedition. The superior's bleak response complicates any straightforward happy ending. This is ancient literature, not a documented voyage to a recoverable serpent island.

WHY IT STAYS WITH US

The most surprising presence on the island is grief. A creature that could have remained a threat becomes a witness to a disaster greater than the sailor's own. Yet the frame refuses to guarantee that a good story will comfort its listener. Even a miraculous rescue, once narrated, may fail to quiet the fear waiting at home.

WHERE THIS TELLING COMES FROM

Egyptian Literary Compositions: Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor

University College London, Digital Egypt

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/literature/midegsummaries.html>

Egyptian Tales, First Series: The Shipwrecked Sailor

W. M. Flinders Petrie; Project Gutenberg

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/7386/pg7386-images.html>

RETURN TO THE STORY

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