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Necropolis journal: daily records of events in an ancient Egyptian artisans' community

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Cover Page



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FINAL CONCLUSIONS

After having provided an introduction on the *status quaestionis* concerning the Necropolis Journal as a label for certain documents described in publications by Egyptologists since 1928, the research context has been outlined, and sets of research questions and a methodology have been formulated.

In order to determine whether the notes of the so-called *journals* would be considered as such according to an ancient Egyptian standpoint, this work examined the notion of “journal” in earlier views and in a broader Egyptian perspective. An overview of annals and day-books was presented in order to identify common features and differences between these records and the so-called Necropolis journal. The common features provided the guidelines to formulate the criteria for the distinction of a Necropolis journal. A list of texts from Deir el-Medina was then created according to these criteria (see Chapter 5.1), and it was divided into two sections: documents dated with certainty and documents not dated with certainty (Chapter 5.2 a and b). All documents dated with certainty were then collected and investigated (with photos, transcriptions and translations when available). These documents all appear in a separate appendix for reasons of space and in order to be consulted easily (an online database is also available). The total number of documents dated with certainty is 211 of which 19 were previously totally or partly unpublished.

We have demonstrated that in ancient Egyptian administration there were two main types of journal, namely ‘accounts journal’ and ‘events journal’. Both types record the notes daily, in a mostly respected chronological order, and both are journals, nonetheless they describe different aspects. We have focused upon the latter type because that is the best comparable with the so-called Necropolis journal documents known from publications since 1928 (Botti-Peet). The event journal in Deir el-Medina was not an end product in itself. The presence of control marks on the documents and internal references to documents sent, received and requested, clearly show that the journals were used for internal and external readership and were checked or accessed to retrieve information. It has become also clear that most probably ostraca and papyri had different audiences and different purposes.

Of course, we have seen that there is not a clear cut division line and account journals and event journals slightly overlap from time to time, something that we nowadays would not prefer. Yet, this is how the ancient Egyptian scribes created their administrative records. This is not unsystematic, but only confusing to our mind. It seems that we have

to conclude and accept that there were no fixed rules or prescriptions on how to draw up journals in ancient Egypt.

Some last considerations are needed:

“LA REALTÀ NON È COME CI APPARE”

In chapter 7.2 (*Readership of the day-books*) we tried to determine the intended readership of journals based on their layout and in 7.2.a (*Day-books for internal use?*) we tried to identify the features of those day-books most probably written for internal use. When a document was used for various purposes, for example, we suggested that it would be quite improbable that such a document would end up in the hands of an outside authority. There are for example documents with both literary and administrative/journal texts (i.a. O. IFAO 1255 + O. Varille 39, O. Cairo 25517, O. MMA 14.6.216, and O. Ashmolean Museum 0302 + O. Ashmolean Museum 0342 verso, and see note 197) and others with both journal and magical/ritual texts (e.g. P. Turin 54021 and P. BM EA 9997), or even temple administration in between journal notes (P. Turin 1900 + P. Turin 2048 + P. Turin 2088 + P. Turin 2093 + P. Turin 2097 + P. Turin 2101, recto III²³⁹) and religious texts with journal notes (papyrus Turin Provv. 6289 mentioned in Demichelis 2016, 32-38 bears a version of BD 168 on recto and on verso journal notes dated to year 13 of Ramesses IX).

Why were these journals, just like the annals and day-books discussed in Chapter 4, included in a broader collection of different texts such as letters, literary texts, hymns, medical and mathematical fragments, legal documents, religious and magical texts? We are tempted to conclude that those day-books were most probably written for internal use and not intended as “official documents”. Why, otherwise, would the scribe place or keep these documents together with other kinds of texts?

Let us consider the conclusions of Quack 2014, 111-135, who takes as an example P. BM EA 9997, with medical/magical texts on the recto and accounts/journal on the verso. Quack says that we should not be surprised by the double use of the papyrus, since these kind of magical texts were certainly sacred but not holy. It was therefore

²³⁹ Does the fact that Necropolis texts have been added to temple accounts (which are the originals on this papyrus) mean that the two closely cooperated? Is it maybe a proof that the Necropolis workmen moved to Medinet Habu and the reason of the shift from ostraca to papyri (this last material largely available in the temple archives)? It can be an attractive idea, but we have to consider that this specific document was produced under Ramses IX, still too early for a resettlement of the Community within the walls of Medinet Habu. Or was the administration of Deir el-Medina directed from Medinet Habu already since mid 20th Dynasty?

perfectly acceptable to have other kinds of notes together with those texts. What then about our observation in 7.2.a where we say that a journal was for internal use when the recto or verso was already used for other kinds of note not related to the journal? This sounds quite contrary to the idea of Quack about the ancient Egyptian mentality. But if the ancient Egyptians did not care if magical texts were written on the same papyrus with other kinds of notes, would they not take a similar view in relation to journal notes?

In reality, there is another point to take into consideration: from all the documents we have seen recording the daily notes we can conclude that they seem to be the product of a rather unsystematic administration, or at least we would call it like that. But that's the important point: we. It seems that there is not a single document which we can "define" as the "perfect-looking Journal" according to our point of view (and from here the difficulty of compiling the list of journals as stated in chapter 5.1). But this is how the ancient administrators worked and our opinion is in fact irrelevant. We need to understand both the commonalities and the diversity of the documents produced for the administration of the Deir el-Medina community. This kind of unsystematic (for us) administration was working for them, since they kept on using it for centuries, during which the royal tombs were dug and decorated in the Valleys of Kings and the Queens which we can still admire today.