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

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## SUMMARY

### NECROPOLIS JOURNAL: DAILY RECORDS OF EVENTS IN AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ARTISANS' COMMUNITY

In Egyptological literature, Necropolis journals are considered as records written on papyri and ostraca concerning the activities of the workmen or artisan community of Deir el-Medina in Thebes. In these notes, written by the scribes in hieratic, information about the gang of workmen employed in the construction of the royal tombs in the Valleys of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens throughout the Ramesside period is given (c. 1300-1100 BC): their payments, presence or absence, collective administration, private problems concerning individual crew members, internal perturbations (strikes, trials, etc.), visits by officials and incursions from “foreigners”.

These documents are therefore of extreme interest as they provide detailed information about the life of the village and its inhabitants. They have been labelled ‘Necropolis journal’ ever since the first publication of such documents from the late 20th Dynasty by Botti and Peet 1928 (*“Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe”*). Since then, the idea of “a journal” and notably “an events journal” developed amongst Egyptologists and it appeared in almost all publications about the Deir el-Medina community, without really saying what in fact this would mean in practice. The question has arisen as to whether indeed this was a specific genre of document.

*Is it correct to define such notes as journals? Would they be considered journals from an ancient Egyptian point of view? What is a Necropolis journal and did the concept of a Necropolis journal exist in the minds of the scribes of Deir el-Medina? What do the different kinds of annals and day-books have in common? Who was the intended readership? How many types of journal can we identify? How can the list of such documents called journals become a useful updatable tool available to all scholars interested in the subject?*

These are our main research questions we tried to answer in this study.

This work examined whether the notes of the so-called Necropolis journal would be considered as such according to the ancient Egyptian point of view, i.e. if the concept of Necropolis journal existed. To this end, the concept of journal in a broader Egyptian perspective has been researched comparing material ranging from the Old Kingdom until the New Kingdom in order to identify common features and differences between these records and the so-called Necropolis journal. Conclusions were then drawn in the form of criteria to identify what a Necropolis journal is.

A new list of documents considered as Necropolis journals was then created according to these criteria, and it was divided into two sections: documents dated with certainty and documents not dated with certainty. All the documents dated with certainty were then collected and investigated (together with photos, transcriptions and translations). These documents all appear in a separate Appendix for reasons of space and in order to be consulted easily.

We proceeded then to see if it was possible to understand for whom Necropolis journals were written, i.e. who was the intended readership. In our opinion examining the way the content of the notes is organised can tell us if they were meant for internal use or instead to be submitted to a higher authority or simply to be audited. We can indeed imagine that, if a document was written to be submitted to someone or to retrieve information later, the scribe would try to write it and present it orderly: neat and clear, with the intention of facilitating its reading. If, on the other hand, the document shows a disordered appearance or the notes are written randomly on the page and occupy all the available small spaces, it is rather improbable that such a document would end up in the hands of someone else to be checked.

Based on the available inventory of dated documents, we could identify two main groups according to their layout: on the one hand, sloppy and careless documents that seem to have been hastily written and on the other hand, a group of more precise day-books which are well-organised and written in neat and compact business-like handwriting. Nonetheless, it became clear that the question “Who was the intended readership of the day-books?” cannot be definitively answered. It is impossible to trace a real and clear-cut distinction and place the documents into categories affirming with certainty that some journals were for internal use and others were meant for a superior. We lack evidence and can only guess and wait until new findings might throw light on the issue. Surely, we can conclude that some documents, given the presence of control marks as traces of the act of accessing and retrieving information in the material, suggest that the scribes did not write simply for the sake of writing. Instead, these texts, at least some of them, were somehow used and “checked”. Others were written and remained documents for an internal use in the village.

Journals had therefore different audiences and different purposes.

There were thus different types of documents, all looking like journals, but they must have had different purposes. We attempted to identify and describe smaller subgroups of journal encountered according to their content (deliveries/provisions, absences/presences, work completed and events concerning the community, which we called respectively group A, B, C and D). For purposes of study only, we made note of and list the differences amongst the types of journals. We realized that Necropolis

journal, even if it existed as a concept in the minds of the scribes of Deir el-Medina, was not a fixed genre. But as a result of our research it has become clear that the Necropolis journal was a type of “events journal”, for which some parallels can be found in war diaries and ship’s logs.

The last objective of this study was finally to make the research done, not for its own sake, but share it with all Egyptologists interested, making the work done not an end point but a useful starting-point for further studies, answering thus to our question: How can the list become a useful updatable tool available to all scholars interested in the subject? To this aim, the Necropolis Journal database that was built and used during our work has been published online at <https://www.edicionesadaegyptum.com/irenemorfini/>. We are aware of the fact that the ongoing project of the papyrus database of the Museo Egizio of Turin (only for specialists so far), the available Deir el-Medina database and Trismegistos, already provide much useful information. Nonetheless, it is our aim to offer a Necropolis journal database, i.e. only dedicated to this kind of records, with the intention to facilitate the creation of a separate branch of texts amongst the vast number of 4506 records present for example in the Deir el-Medina database (last consulted on August 2018).