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INTRODUCTION

“The falcon has flown to heaven; another has arisen in his place!”

A message along these lines¹ will have resounded on about two dozen occasions in the valleys west of the city of Thebes, when an official was sent to a crew of necropolis workmen that laboured and resided in this area. These men, burdened with the task of preparing the royal tombs, will have been overcome with different emotions when these words were uttered: the king had died, and his funeral had to be prepared. If the tomb of the king had not yet been finalised, great efforts would have to be made to complete the sepulchre in time. In addition, the accession of the new king meant that the construction of a new tomb was to be started not long after the funeral. Eventful days lay ahead for the crew of workmen.

It is this group of individuals that are the main characters of this story, a tale that leads us through many episodes of what Egyptologists have termed the New Kingdom. The period comprises of three royal dynasties: the 18th Dynasty (c. 1539 – 1292 BCE), the 19th Dynasty (c. 1292 – 1191 BCE) and the 20th Dynasty (c. 1190 – 1077 BCE).² The three dynasties divide the New Kingdom into uneven segments, but it is a convenient way to describe the history of the Royal Necropolis workmen because it coincides with two important events. The first one is a reorganisation of the crew in the reign of Horemheb, the last ruler of the 18th Dynasty.³ The second moment occurred in the reign of the second king of the 20th Dynasty, Ramesses III. This breakpoint is not so much represented by a singular occasion as it is by a significant increase in the number of sources that inform us about the lives of the workmen during this time.

Indeed, the community of workmen is exceptionally well documented. The small village that was erected in the 18th Dynasty to house the necropolis workmen is one of the best preserved settlements of antiquity. The inhabitants simply called it *pꜣ dmi* ‘The Village’, while in modern times it is referred to as Deir el-Medina, the Arabic name for the site. Situated in the vicinity of the Valley of the Kings – the necropolis that retained the tombs of the pharaohs of the New Kingdom – and Valley of the Queens – the cemetery of royal wives and princes – the village lies behind the hill of the Qurnet Murai (FIG. 1). It consisted of a group of houses within an enclosure wall that were inhabited by generations of necropolis workmen and their family members. Here numerous workmen would be born and raised, here they would spend most of their lives, and eventually they would be buried in one of tombs in the Eastern or the Western Cemeteries that flanked that village (FIG. 2). Local places of worship were situated to the north of the village, in an area with sanctuaries and chapels for the cult of various gods and deified kings. Outside of the village the crew of workmen left its traces as well. Temporary settlements consisting of small huts were raised in proximity of their worksites in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens. Another provisional group of huts used by the necropolis workmen, often called the *Station de Repos du Col*, was constructed not far from the village of Deir el-Medina along the path leading to the Valley of the Kings.

Archaeological finds from all these sites are very rich and paint the most vivid pictures of the lives of the community members. They shed light on numerous aspects of local religious beliefs, social practices, literary and artistic lives. The prosopographical data

¹ Compare O. Cairo CG 25515; O. DeM 39; P. Turin Cat. 1949+ vso.

² Erik Hornung, Rolf Krauss and David A. Warburton (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*. HdO 83 (Leiden and Boston 2006), 492-493.

³ See chapter 6, 6.2.3.

INTRODUCTION

that are recorded on the funerary and commemorative stelae, tombs, statues and other monuments dedicated by the villagers are immensely detailed. Despite their complex nature, they have allowed scholars to reconstruct genealogical trees of numerous families. In addition, a vastly rich corpus of epigraphic material has been preserved at the sites in the form of thousands of ostraca (limestone chips or ceramic shards that were used as a surface for writing) and hundreds of papyri. Besides literary and poetic compositions, hymns, religious and magical texts, and medical treatises there is a great amount of texts of a documentary nature, mostly written in hieratic script. The latter category encompasses the records of the administration of the Royal Necropolis that were kept during the Ramesside Period, but there are also documents of juridical nature such as court proceedings, private letters and (business) accounts of individual necropolis workmen.

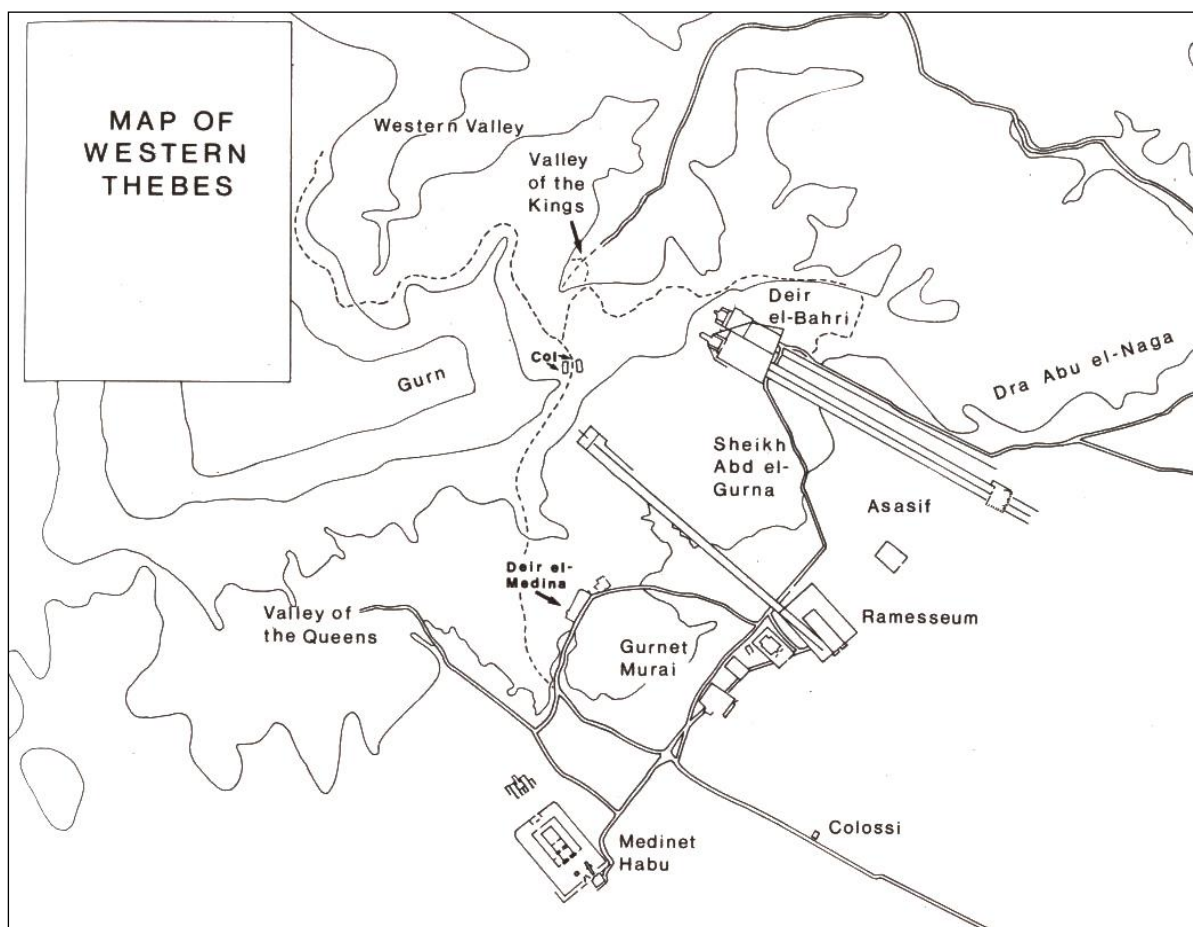


FIGURE 1. MAP OF WESTERN THEBES DURING THE RAMESSIDE PERIOD. AFTER LESKO (ED.), *PHARAOH'S WORKERS*, FIG. ON P. 3.

In scholarly literature the necropolis workmen have been described as ‘workers’, ‘workmen’, ‘artisans’, ‘artists’, and ‘servants’. The latter term is a translation of the word *sdm-š*, literally ‘one who hears the call’⁴, a very common title used by the workmen themselves. During the Ramesside Period, the title was often specified by the addition of the institute to which the necropolis workmen were affiliated: the *s.t mš.t*, generally translated as the Place of Truth.⁵ The construction-project-in-process was commonly referred to as *p3 hr*,

⁴ *WB IV*, 389, 12-16; 390, 1-4.

⁵ On the meaning of this title and its usage see Jaroslav Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*. BdÉ 50. 2nd ed. (Cairo 2001), 29-85, and recently, Ben J.J. Haring, ‘Saqqara – A Place of Truth?’ (forthcoming).

‘The Tomb’, an element that occurs in many of the titles of the men involved in the operation. To describe the units of workmen, the administration of the 19th and 20th Dynasties employed nomenclature borrowed from naval contexts. The team of workmen was called *tꜣ is.t* ‘The Crew’, used in earlier periods for crews of sailors.⁶ This crew was divided into halves that were called the ‘right’ and the ‘left side’, maritime terms for the oarsmen on both sides of a ship.⁷

The lack of written administrative records from the 18th Dynasty precludes a comprehensive overview of the organisation of the crew during that period.⁸ Much of the discourse about the administration of the Royal Necropolis has therefore focused on the Ramesside Period. During most of this era the crew was directed on site by three ‘captains’: two of them were the chief workmen (also referred to as ‘foremen’ in this work), who each presided over one of the sides of the crew. Both foremen were assisted by a deputy, oftentimes a son of the foreman who would eventually succeed him in office. The third captain was the necropolis scribe. He was a senior administrative scribe who would be responsible for much of the written administration of the work on the royal tomb.⁹ The administration entailed matters such as the documentation of absenteeism of workmen, keeping accounts of the supplies needed in the preparation of the tomb, logging the delivery and distribution of daily rations and noting the progress of the construction of the tomb. One particular type of document that is best attested during the 20th Dynasty is commonly referred to as a journal text. This is the collection of day-by-day records that combine several administrative details, often supplemented by notes of events that had occurred on a particular day, such as the aforementioned death of the king or the recruitment of new members.

The crew itself, which will in this work often be referred to simply as “the necropolis workmen”, was not a homogenous group of individuals. It included stone cutters, mostly unskilled labourers whose main duty was to cut out the chambers and galleries of the royal tombs and haul off the rubble. Other crew members, however, were experienced draughtsmen and sculptors that were responsible for the decoration of the tomb. Besides strictly professional differentiation, a social stratification existed within the community of the Royal Necropolis. Some workmen had adopted certain titles for themselves. For example, men other than the official necropolis scribe who were capable of reading and writing – to whatever extent – often referred to themselves as a ‘scribe’ as well. Furthermore, epigraphic material from the site records several instances of a man who was called the ‘scorpion controller’. He was probably a workman with the additional responsibility of catching the snakes and scorpions that crawled around in the area, and administering antidotes to persons who had been bitten. At times, a different workman performed to the role of the physician of the crew. Other crew members performed tasks in the sanctuaries around the village and carried titles such as ‘*wab*-priest’.

The workmen of the Royal Necropolis lived and worked in a restricted area that would not have been accessible to many others, and the region was guarded by policemen

⁶ Černý, *Community*, 99-100.

⁷ Černý, *Community*, 101-102. In most of the egyptological literature the words “right side” and “left side” are placed between apostrophes. In chapters 3 and 4 it will be shown that the division into two groups reflects a significant reality of the organisation of work on the tomb. For that reason the apostrophes are omitted in this work.

⁸ This is remedied to some extent in chapter 1, 1.4.

⁹ The senior necropolis scribe was certainly not the only scribe in the community of Deir el-Medina, and it remains difficult to distinguish his administrative tasks from those of the other scribes of the village.

referred to in the sources as the Medjay. Doorkeepers and guardians¹⁰ monitored offices around the village and accompanied the workmen in the Valley of the Kings. This does not mean that the workmen lived secluded lives. Working on an important state-led project, the crew was occasionally visited by Theban officials, sometimes by the vizier himself, who came to inspect the progress of the work. More importantly the crew members stood in close contact with a pool of service agents, collectively referred to as the *smd.t* service personnel. As employees of the state, the necropolis workmen were paid wages in the form of rations that were sent from the Treasury, the Granary and various memorial temples of Thebes. The provisions included water, beer, bread, grain, fish, and the occasional cut of meat. It was the task of the *smd.t* agents to transfer these provisions, together with materials, tools, supplies and fuels, to the workmen of the Royal Necropolis. During much of the Ramesside Period the necropolis workmen therefore interacted with numerous woodcutters, fishermen, potters, gypsum-makers, water-carriers and laundrymen.

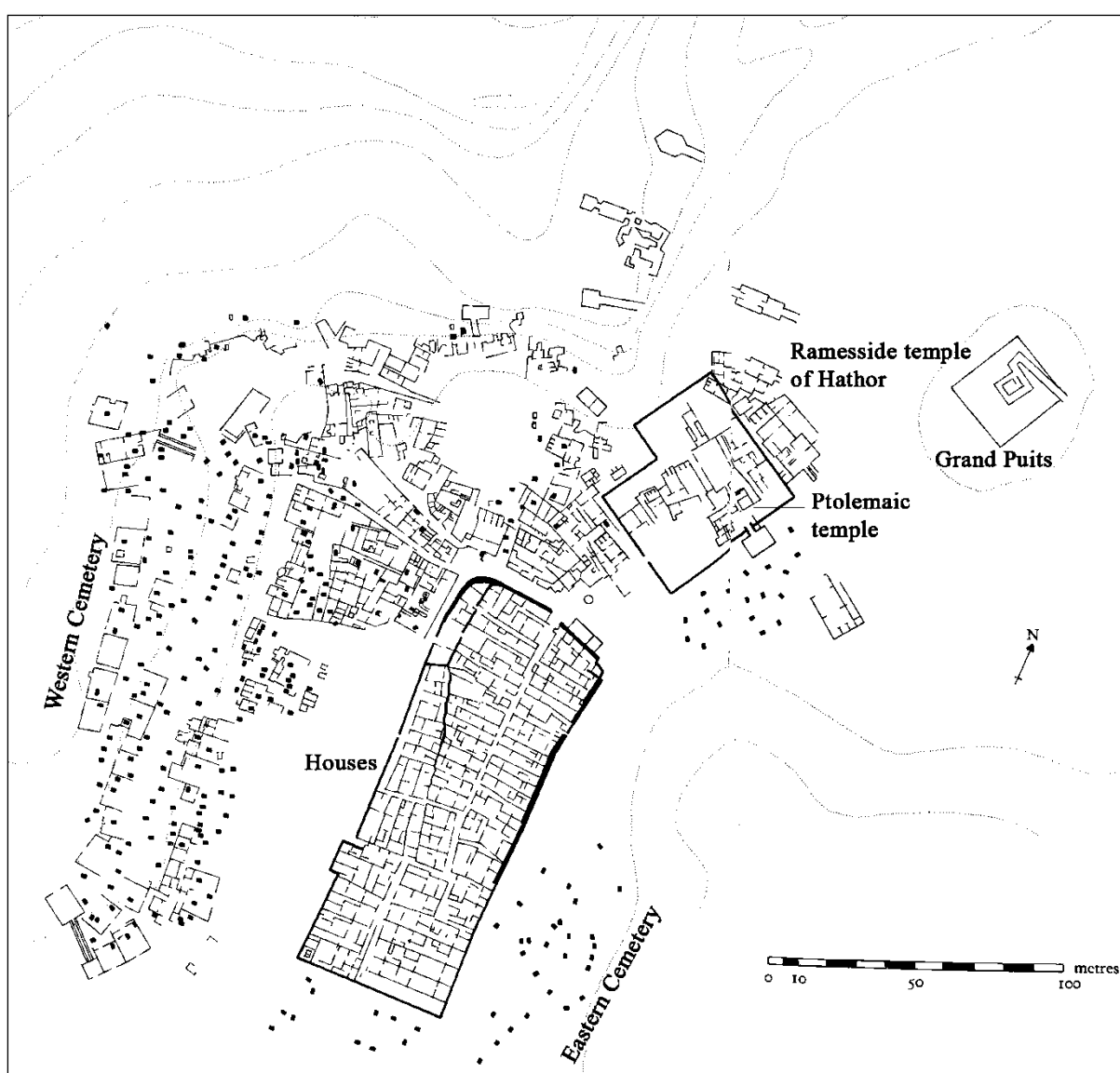


FIGURE 2. MAP OF THE VILLAGE OF DEIR EL-MEDINA

¹⁰ Whether the guardians were in fact workmen of the crew with an additional task is still a matter of debate, compare e.g. Černý, *Community*, 149 and Dominique Valbelle, "Les ouvriers de la tombe". *Deir el-Médineh à l'époque Ramesside*. BdÉ 96 (Cairo 1985), 99-100.

The site of the Royal Necropolis of Thebes is a treasure chest of information about the construction of the tombs of the royal families, the organisation and administration of the work, as well as countless aspects of life in and around New Kingdom Thebes. Scholars have long ago realised this, and for about a century Deir el-Medina and its inhabitants have been the focus of a large number of studies. Many of these are dedicated to the publication of tombs, houses, and huts that were created for the necropolis workmen, and to the material remains found therein. Among a considerable number of the finds were objects inscribed or incised with an individual mark. Primarily through the work of Ben Haring, these marks were demonstrated to be identity marks: signs, of an abstract nature or borrowed from script, that refer to the identity of individual necropolis workmen. They are often indicators of ownership that were applied to objects, but they were also inscribed in series on ostraca.

This work focuses on identity marks inscribed on ostraca, but the marks were commonly used to inscribe objects and surfaces in structures and open spaces. Objects with marks come from intersecting contexts of the funerary sphere, the votive or religious sphere, the domestic sphere and the professional sphere. Marked objects have been discovered in the houses of the village, the dumps at the borders of the village, the massive dump site of the so-called Grand Puits north of the temple area (see FIG. 2), the cemeteries and tombs of Deir el-Medina, the votive chapels and temples of the village, as well as in the Valley of the Kings, including areas adjacent to royal tombs and the workmen's huts erected there.

Pottery is probably the largest category of objects from community of Royal Necropolis workmen that bear identity marks. They are found on pottery of all sorts that comes from the houses in the village, the dump sites around them, the tombs in the cemeteries of Deir el-Medina, the huts at the *Station de la Repos du Col* and the temporary settlements in the Valley of the Kings. Domestic objects, discovered in houses at the village, in tombs in the cemeteries of Deir el-Medina, as well as in huts at the *Station de la Repos du Col* and in the Valley of the Kings display workmen's marks: stools and seats, lamps, foots of lamps or altars, a standard of a lamp, head rests, wooden docketts, a wooden comb, linen clothing items, and prestigious objects such as bronze amphora stands, bronze bowls and containers. Several tools, mostly recovered from Deir el-Medina in tombs, houses and dumps are incised with workmen's marks as well: a trowel, mallets, an adze, wooden handles of chisels, wooden objects, wooden sticks, a wooden throw stick, wooden blocks, a wooden pole used for baking, a limestone mould of a figurine, and clay devices for heating bronze tools. Workmen's marks appear also as graffiti. The greater majority of graffiti with marks have been left by the necropolis workmen in the Theban mountains, but they are also attested on the pavement of the Ramesside temple at the settlement. They are sometimes combined with hieratic inscriptions, and as will be seen later on, at times these graffiti play an important role in this study.

Although a systematic study of the meaning and the function of identity marks from the Royal Necropolis was never conducted, the marks had not gone unnoticed.¹¹ In fact, one of the first serious attempts to interpret the marks was quite valuable. It was put forward by Georges Daressy in his publication of a series of ostraca from the Valley of the Kings.¹² Although his comments on ostraca with workmen's marks were brief, we now see that some of them were correct. The marks were described in different words: "signes,"¹³ "signes de

¹¹ Mention of the marks was made in print for the first time in 1868 in a publication of ostraca from the British Museum by Samuel Birch. At the time hardly anything was known about the context of ostraca with marks, and the marks were described as "hieroglyphs" and as "hieratic writing, the purport of which is obscure", see Samuel Birch, *Inscriptions in the Hieratic and Demotic Character from the Collections of the British Museum* (London 1868), 5, no. 5861; no. 5642.

¹² Georges Daressy, *Ostraca. Nos. 25001-25385*. CGC (Cairo 1901).

¹³ Daressy, *Ostraca*, 81, O. Cairo CG 25315.

fantaisie”,¹⁴ “marques”¹⁵ and “Série de marques de pierres (?)”¹⁶. Slightly more accurate is the categorisation of ostrakon O. Cairo CG 25316 as “comptes d’ouvriers (?)”.¹⁷ His most explicit description concerns O. Cairo CG 25326, the accession number for nine ostraca with a single identity mark combined with a number of strokes each. Daressy proposed that these were individual attendance sheets, counting the number of days a workman had laboured.¹⁸ A very similar interpretation can be found in Daressy’s comments on ostraca O. Cairo CG 24105 – 24108, although the identity marks themselves were once again called “signes de fantaisie”.¹⁹

Workmen’s marks on ostraca, pottery fragments and other objects will occasionally have emerged among the finds of the missions that scavenged the Valley of the Kings during the early 20th century. Much to our regret, the explorers of that time were hardly interested in such matters, and we possess only some tantalising notes of their observations. Howard Carter for example, who discovered several ostraca with workmen’s marks during his excavations in the Valley of the Kings, does not seem to have been very interested in them. Only a single reference to an ostrakon with identity marks is made in his manuscripts. It concerns a piece found in 1922 near the tomb of Siptah, Find nr. 373: “[Limestone splinter bearing] primitive hiero[lyph]s.”²⁰ Edward Ayrton mentioned ostraca with workmen’s marks found at the workmen’s huts near the tomb of Seti I in a private letter to Theodore M. Davis from December 1908, where he called them “‘Mediterranean’ ostraka”. Although Ayrton wrote that he had a theory as to their meaning, he does not elaborate on it.²¹ In his report of the excavations of 1905 and 1906, Ayrton spoke of pottery fragments that had belonged to the workmen of the tomb found in front of the tomb of Ramesses IV. He added that “[m]ost of the pots had marks scratched on them, which are interesting, because their date is quite certain. As several fragments bear the name of Ramesses II, and no other name appears on them, it is probable that this rubbish is all from his tomb”.²² It can only be called unfortunate for our current purposes that this material was never fully disseminated.

Ayrton’s idea about the “Mediterranean” nature of the marks seems to resonate in William Flinders Petrie’s work, written only a few years later. He attributed the marks on a number of ostraca in his possession a place in a grand scheme of other signs and letters attested at different archaeological sites in an attempt to explain the origin of the alphabet.²³ Dating his Theban ostraca to the 19th Dynasty he interpreted the marks as “foreign signs” with phonetic values, which formed words or sentences.²⁴ In a discussion of a different ostrakon (O. UC 45788) in a brief article some years later, he explained the marks on that piece as signs that referred not to individuals, but to boats. The strokes added to the marks

¹⁴ Daressy, *Ostraca*, 83, O. Cairo CG 25327.

¹⁵ Daressy, *Ostraca*, *passim*.

¹⁶ Daressy, *Ostraca*, 82, O. Cairo CG 25317.

¹⁷ Daressy, *Ostraca*, 82.

¹⁸ Daressy, *Ostraca*, 83.

¹⁹ Georges Daressy, *Fouilles de la Vallée des Rois (1898-1899). Nos. 24001-24990*. CGC (Cairo 1902), 64.

²⁰ Carter MSS, page 24 of Notebook E, 5th excavation season. Transcript accessible via <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/cc/page/tscript/ts24b.html>. The suggestion that these “primitive hieroglyphs” might be workmen’s marks was first made by Gregor Neunert, ‘Neues von Siptah. Einige Ergänzungen zur Titulatur des Königs’ in: Dieter Kessler, Regine Schulz, Martina Ullmann *et al.* (eds.), *Texte –Theben – Tonfragmente. Festschrift für Günter Burkard*. ÄAT 76 (Wiesbaden 2009), 333.



²¹ Carl Nicholas Reeves, *Valley of the Kings. The decline of a royal necropolis* (London 1990), 337, Document D.


²² Edward Ayrton, ‘The excavations during the winters of 1905-1906’ in: Theodore M. Davis, Gaston Maspero, Edward Norton *et al.*, *The Tomb of Siptah; the Monkey Tomb and the Gold Tomb*. Theodore M. Davis’ excavations: Bibân el Molûk (London 1908), 7.

²³ William M. Flinders Petrie, *The foundation of the Alphabet*. BSAE 3 (London 1912), pl. I.



²⁴ Petrie, *Alphabet*, caption of pl. I; 2.

were seen as “probably [...] tallies of the delivery of boat loads of stone”. Petrie noted that, as some signs faced right and some left, the scribe of the ostrakon could not have been very experienced and had probably “learned his signs from big monuments, on which they face either way for symmetry.”²⁵

In general, the excavators of Deir el-Medina dedicated more thought to the marks that were discovered on objects and ostraca from different sites at the village. Ernesto Schiaparelli, whose team discovered the intact tomb of Kha (TT 8), found that many of the objects in the funerary equipment were inscribed with marks. The marks on pieces of linen items featured briefly in his publication of the tomb and its content. Noting that a few linen items were inscribed with the name of Kha, he surmised that mark , called “una specie di cifra”, must have represented Kha in the same way clothing was marked in the days of Schiaparelli himself.²⁶ While mark  is present on several ceramic vessels published in his report, along with a few other marks on objects and pottery, only the mark of Kha on a bronze container²⁷ and a bronze vessel standard²⁸ were highlighted.

Later, Bernard Bruyère, director of the excavations of the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology at Deir el-Medina from 1922 to 1951, must have encountered thousands of workmen’s marks during his work in and around the settlement. His first ideas on the marks were published in 1925, when he examined mark  incised on the seat of a stool. Bruyère recognised that this mark was the same as the one attested on the linen cloths from the tomb of Kha. Moreover, he was the first to realise that the marks on objects from Deir el-Medina and on ostraca belonged to the same system:

*On peut relever dans la nécropole, sur des objets de toute espèce, une catégorie de signes différents, les uns pris dans le répertoire hiéroglyphique, les autres absolument étrangers à toute écriture connue. G. Daressy [...] et T. [sic] Birch [...] ont publié des ostraca trouvés à Thèbes et portant une suite de ces signes, dans lesquels on a essayé de voir une graphie secrète.*²⁹

Bruyère noted that the signs could have been either marks of individual workmen, or marks of workshops at the necropolis. Since the mark of Kha was attested at TT 8 as well as in and around other tombs at Deir el-Medina, he believed the latter theory to be the most probable.³⁰ Yet, in his report of season 1933-1934, it appears that Bruyère had reconsidered his statement in favour of his first theory about the signs as marks of workmen. In reports published in 1925, Bruyère referred to the signs as “marques”, “marques doliaires” – loosely translated as “potmarks” – as well as “marques de propriété”. Occasionally, he endeavoured to connect the marks with the corresponding individuals. Regarding mark , attested on all items of pottery from the tomb of Huynifer (DM 1322-1323), he proposed that the signs were property marks that belonged to the tomb owner Huynifer himself.³¹ Nevertheless, Bruyère kept an open mind about some signs. Mark , the hieroglyphic group *nb t3.w.y*, found on an amphora stamped with royal cartouches was considered to be an indication that the vessel came from royal storerooms.³² In later reports, Bruyère paid more attention to the function of the marks.

²⁵ William M. Flinders Petrie, ‘Boat names in Egypt’ *AE B.3* (1915), 136-137.

²⁶ Ernesto Schiaparelli, *Relazione sui lavori della Missione Archeologica Italiana in Egitto (anni 1903-1920)*. Vol. 2. *La tomba intatta dell'architetto “Cha” nella necropoli di Tebe* (Turin 1927), 93.

²⁷ Schiaparelli, *La tomba*, 135-136.

²⁸ Schiaparelli, *La tomba*, 143.

²⁹ Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1923-1924)*. FIFAO 2.2 (Cairo 1925), 89-90.

³⁰ Bruyère, *Rapport 1923-1924*, 90.

³¹ Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1933-1934)* I. FIFAO 14 (Cairo 1937), 55. The present study has not been able to substantiate or refute Bruyère’s suggestion.

³² Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935)* II. FIFAO 15 (Cairo 1937), 93-94.

In regards to the marks on the footing of altars or lamps, he pointed out that the marks were added as a “sort of guaranty against theft”.³³ In the same report he examined the marks on three wooden blocks. In his opinion, the fact that another block was inscribed with a proper name suggested that the blocks with an isolated mark were indicators of ownership. Because the objects were marked, they must have been of considerable value. Bruyère remarked furthermore that the hieroglyphic signs that constitute the marks on these blocks were not evidently abbreviations of proper names. For that reason he wondered whether instead the signs were borrowed from the calendar of lucky and unlucky days or from board games.³⁴

Conversely, many of the marks engraved in the pavement of the Ramesside temple of Hathor at Deir el-Medina were seen by him as abbreviated forms of the names of workmen. The marks themselves were interpreted as votive graffiti.³⁵ In Bruyère’s final excavation report, a separate section was dedicated to the workmen’s marks found on pottery fragments from the Grand Puits. He explained that the marks occur on domestic objects, linen, tools and toiletries, and that some marks were borrowed from hieroglyphic script while others were inspired by “la fantaisie ou par une cryptographie étrangère”. Concerning the marks on pottery Bruyère theorised that it must have been essential to mark vessels with identity marks as they contained products brought to the village as the salary of the workmen and had to be easily recognisable during distribution by the scribes.³⁶ Later, Bruyère proposed to attribute a mark attested on pottery and building blocks from tomb TT 1 and its surroundings to Sennedjem, the owner of that tomb,³⁷ an interpretation that we will see is correct.³⁸

Another connection between an identity mark and a particular workman was established in one of the first Deir el-Medina tombs to be published in a monograph. The work deals with TT 5, the tomb of Neferabet, which was examined by Jacques Vandier and Jeanne Vandier d’Abbadie. They mentioned *en passant* a number of shards, which were incised with the “marque de propriété” of Neferabet.³⁹ Similar valuable contributions to the study of workmen’s marks were made by Georges Nagel, the ceramicist of the French excavations at Deir el-Medina. He recorded several marks in the excavation reports published by Bruyère, and in his own monograph on the pottery from the settlement⁴⁰ he duplicated these notes and published several additional marks found on pottery as well as on other objects. Nagel sensibly distinguished between potters’ marks, which are incised before firing of the vessel, and property marks, which are incised or inscribed after firing. The latter category was by far most often attested. Nagel noted that pottery recovered from tombs demonstrated a great variety of marks within a single ensemble. As the majority of the Deir el-Medina tombs had remained anonymous to the researchers, Nagel was not able to attribute marks to individuals. Yet, he remarked that the marks were interesting and expressed his hopes that later studies might be able to identify the individuals behind the marks.⁴¹

One might expect that the brilliant hieraticist Jaroslav Černý, famed for his work on documents from Deir el-Medina and the lives of its inhabitants, would have directed his attention to the identity marks, but his comments on the matter are surprisingly concise. Černý’s notebooks reveal that he did transcribe a few dozens of unpublished ostraca with workmen’s marks. For example, in NB 106.20, ostraca Cairo JE 72490 – JE 72500 are listed

³³ Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935)* III. FIFAO 16 (Cairo 1939), 213.

³⁴ Bruyère, *Rapport 1934-1935* III, 224.

³⁵ Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1935 à 1940)* I. FIFAO 20.1 (Cairo 1948), 83.

³⁶ Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1948 à 1951)*. FIFAO 26 (Cairo 1953), 60.

³⁷ Bernard Bruyère, *La tombe No. 1 de Sen-nedjem à Deir el Médineh*. MIFAO 88 (Cairo 1958), 5.

³⁸ See chapter 5, 5.2.1; 5.2.2.7.

³⁹ Jacques Vandier and Jeanne Vandier d’Abbadie, *Tombes de Deir el-Médineh. La tombe de Nefer-Abou*. MIFAO 69 (Cairo 1935), 54 and fig. 32. See chapter 5, 5.2.1; 5.2.2.6.

⁴⁰ Georges Nagel, *La céramique du Nouvel Empire à Deir el Médineh*. Tome I. DFIFAO 10 (Cairo 1938).

⁴¹ Nagel, *La céramique*, x.

under the heading “Ostraca avec des marques d’ouvriers”.⁴² Yet, the total of ostraca with workmen’s marks examined by Černý pales in comparison to the hundreds of marks ostraca discovered by the French mission,⁴³ all of which must have been seen by him. It is perhaps just as odd that the marks do not feature at all in his seminal book *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*. On the other hand it is well evident that the copious amounts of hieratic papyri and ostraca from the settlement had occupied the scholar to such an extent that he gave precedence to the discussion of textual documents. Černý did publish a small number of ostraca with workmen’s marks. The marks were either not mentioned,⁴⁴ or referred to as “marques”⁴⁵ or as “marques d’ouvriers (?)”⁴⁶. One particular type of ostraca with marks⁴⁷ must have intrigued Černý, and in a private letter written by him to Rob Demarée the former scholar proposed – correctly, as we shall see – to interpret these documents as records of a duty roster.⁴⁸

Some years later the existence of ostraca with marks from Thebes was mentioned by Sir Alan H. Gardiner,⁴⁹ but it was not until 1975 that the subject was touched upon again, this time by Dominique Valbelle in her publication of the tomb of Hay (TT 267). Building on Bruyère’s ideas, she stated that the majority of the inhabitants of the village of Deir el-Medina possessed their own property mark, and pointed out that these marks are attested on pottery, ostraca and domestic objects. She identified the mark of Hay in several graffiti in the Theban mountains, where the mark was executed next to an inscription of Hay’s name.⁵⁰

During the same decade, workmen’s marks featured in the publications of the ostraca in the collection of Turin by Jesús López, but they were not explicitly identified as such. The marks were described as “signi” or “signi di scrittura”.⁵¹ Some ostraca were tentatively categorised as student’s exercises,⁵² others as accounts⁵³ or inventories.⁵⁴ Similarly, in Yvan Koenig’s publication of ostraca in Strasbourg, workmen’s marks were signalled as “marques”

⁴² Černý NB 106.20.

⁴³ These ostraca, kept at the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo, are still unpublished. Many of these ostraca are discussed in this work (chapters 2, 3 and 4; hand copies in Appendix II) for the first time.

⁴⁴ Jaroslav Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médineh*. I. Nos. 1 à 113. DFIFAO 3 (Cairo 1935), 7-8, O. DeM 32; Jaroslav Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médineh*. IV. 242 à 339. DFIFAO 6 (Cairo 1939), 7, O. DeM 264; Jaroslav Černý, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médineh*. VII. Nos. 624-705. DFIFAO 14 (Cairo 1970), 5-6, O. DeM 646.

⁴⁵ Černý, *Ostraca hiératiques* I, 8, O. DeM 34; Jaroslav Černý, *Ostraca hiératiques*. Nos. 25501-25832. CGC. (Cairo 1935), 52, O. Cairo CG 25660.

⁴⁶ Černý, *Ostraca hiératiques*. Nos. 25501-25832, O. Cairo CG 25569; 49, O. Cairo CG 25651; the marks were interpreted as personal property markers in Jaroslav Černý, ‘Nouvelle série de questions adressées aux oracles’ *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 22: “la marque spéciale qu’avait adoptée chaque ouvrier – car c’est bien des ouvriers qu’il s’agit ici – pour pouvoir marquer des objets lui appartenant [...]”

⁴⁷ See chapter 3.

⁴⁸ A copy of the letter was kindly provided by Rob Demarée; see also chapter 3, 169 and n. 14.

⁴⁹ The marks were described as “cryptic symbols sometimes accompanied by numbers” and they were compared to “symbols” found in onomastica, see Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*. Text (2 vols) and Plates (Oxford 1947), 11 and n. 2.

⁵⁰ Dominique Valbelle, *La tombe de Hay à Deir el-Médineh [No 267]*. MIFAO 95 (Cairo 1975), 36 and fig. 20.

⁵¹ E.g. Jesús López, *Ostraca Ieratici*. N. 57001-57092. Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, 2nd series. 3, fasc. 1 (Milan 1978), 19, O. Turin N. 57008; Jesús López, *Ostraca Ieratici*. N. 57093-57319. Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, 2nd series. 3, fasc. 2 (Milan 1980), 22, O. Turin N. 57140.

⁵² E.g. Jesús López, *Ostraca Ieratici*. N. 57320-57449. Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, 2nd series. 3, fasc. 3 (Milan 1982), 17, O. Turin N. 57350.

⁵³ E.g. López, *Ostraca Ieratici*. N. 57320-57449, 31, O. Turin N. 57394.

⁵⁴ E.g. Jesús López, *Ostraca Ieratici*. N. 57450-57568. *Tablelle Lignee* N. 58001-58007. Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, 2nd series. 3, fasc. 4 (Milan 1984), 34, O. Turin N. 57532.

without further commentary.⁵⁵ In a review of this work, Matthias Müller suggested that ostrakon Gardiner AG 8⁵⁶ might offer an insight into this category of ostraca, provided that the hieratic text on the obverse is related to the marks on the reverse.⁵⁷

The new editions of ostraca with marks thus overlooked the theories of Bruyère, Nagel, and Daressy. Nevertheless, they may have renewed scholarly interest in the subject, because ostraca with marks were referred to in several subsequent works. They were mentioned in Christopher Eyre's dissertation as part of a discussion about the rate of literacy among the community of workmen of the Royal Necropolis. The marks were described as "[s]imple, single signs, often not signs belonging to the writing system [...]" which "[...] would be readily recognizable by illiterate workmen [...]", who used them as marks of ownership.⁵⁸ Joyce Tyldesley too interpreted workmen's marks, probably those attested on objects, as personal property markers "which were obviously used by the illiterate or partially literate". She mentioned that such signs are attested on the walls of tombs and houses,⁵⁹ but in her opinion the signs were predominantly used to mark laundry that was sent to be cleaned by laundrymen⁶⁰ – perhaps inspired by the marks on the linen from the tomb Kha.

Still more new material with workmen's marks was brought to light during excavations in the Valley of the Kings that took place in the 1990s and 2000s. Somewhat surprisingly, the excavators seemed hesitant to accept previous ideas about the marks in preliminary remarks on these finds. For example, in 1995 Sakuji Yoshimura and Jiro Kondo reported the discovery of 11 ostraca with marks found during archaeological research conducted by a team from Waseda University in the West Valley of the Kings, describing them as "bearing cryptic 'texts' or 'marks'" and comparing them to similar ostraca published by Daressy.⁶¹ Without providing an interpretation of the documents, a later article called them "enigmatic ostraca".⁶² The same term was used for ostraca found by the team of Otto Schaden excavating in the area of KV 10,⁶³ as well as for an ostrakon recovered in 1999 in the Valley of the Kings by the excavations of the Amarna Royal Tomb Project under the direction of Nicholas Reeves. It was said to belong to a "class of ostraca from western Thebes with texts in a bizarre script which is neither true hieroglyphic nor true hieratic."⁶⁴ However, another ostrakon bearing workmen's marks found during the same season was interpreted as the inventory of a tomb, listing items such as linen, a headrest and "other domestic articles".⁶⁵ A very similar initial explanation was given for the marks on ostrakon O. DeM 10121 published in 2006 by Pierre Grandet, where they were tentatively believed to represent the inventory of a temple.⁶⁶

⁵⁵ Yvan Koenig, *Les ostraca hiératiques inédits de la bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg*. DFIFAO 33 (Cairo 1997), 3, O. Strasbourg H. 10 and O. Strasbourg H. 11; 4, O. Strasbourg H. 13; 5, O. Strasbourg H. 45; 6, O. Strasbourg H. 59; 15, O. Strasbourg H. 193.

⁵⁶ Now known as ONL 6539; transcription in *KRI VII*, 356.

⁵⁷ Matthias Müller, review of Koenig, *Les ostraca hiératiques inédits*, in: *LingAeg* 7 (2000), 273. See for this ostrakon chapter 4, 4.3.2.3.

⁵⁸ Christopher J. Eyre, *Employment and Labour Relations in the Theban Necropolis in the Ramesside Period*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Oxford 1980), 67.

⁵⁹ As far as the author is aware no such marks on walls have been published.

⁶⁰ Joyce Tyldesley, *Daughters of Isis. Women of Ancient Egypt* (New York 1994), 120.

⁶¹ Sakuji Yoshimura and Jiro Kondo, 'Excavations at the tomb of Amenophis III' *EA* 7 (1995), 18.

⁶² Sakuji Yoshimura and Jiro Kondo, 'The tomb of Amenophis III: Waseda University excavations 1989-2000' *ASAE* 78 (2004), 207.

⁶³ <http://www.kv-10.com>, season summary of 2003.

⁶⁴ Nicholas Reeves (ed.), *Newsletter of the Valley of the Kings Foundation* 1 (2002), ostrakon depicted in fig. 27. Accessible via <http://www.nicholasreeves.com/item.aspx?category=Writing&id=102>.

⁶⁵ Reeves (ed.), *Newsletter of the Valley of the Kings Foundation* 1, ostrakon depicted in fig. 24. Accessible via <http://www.nicholasreeves.com/item.aspx?category=Writing&id=102>.

⁶⁶ Pierre Grandet, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médîneh X. Nos. 10001-10123*. DFIFAO 46 (Cairo 2006), 118-119. In a later publication the signs on the ostrakon were correctly interpreted as

In contrast, Zahi Hawass was not at all reluctant to offer an explanation of an ostrakon inscribed with workmen's marks. In an online video uploaded in 2009, this archaeologist showed and discussed several ostraca found by the Egyptian excavations in the central Valley of the Kings. One of the ostraca was a piece with workmen's marks with strokes underneath them, and this document was said to record the amounts of "food" consumed on a daily basis by the workmen.⁶⁷ Implicitly, the marks were taken as signs referring to individual workmen.

The identity marks of the Deir el-Medina workmen were dubbed "funny signs" by Richard Parkinson. This term continued to be used in later publications of several other scholars, although they were designated as "signes cabalistiques"⁶⁸ or "name-markers"⁶⁹ as well. Parkinson reiterated the original view that the marks could be used as property markers and that they were used in administrative documents as "abbreviations of people's names", but noted that "[t]heir exact usage and significance, however, is as yet uncertain."⁷⁰

The first scholar after Daressy and Bruyère to discuss the nature and meaning of marks on ostraca in some detail was Andrea McDowell. Her publication in 1993 of ostraca from the Hunterian Museum included two pieces with workmen's marks, and her brief comments would have a significant impact on the study of the Deir el-Medina identity marks. After Černý's interpretation of very similar ostraca,⁷¹ O. Glasgow D. 1925.67 and O. Glasgow D. 1925.85 were explained as duty rosters, a genre of administrative records well known among the 20th Dynasty hieratic ostraca from Deir el-Medina. The marks on the two Glasgow ostraca are combined with semi-hieratic calendar dates, and McDowell suggested they represented workmen who partook in this roster. Comparing the two ostraca with marks to similar hieratic documents McDowell proposed to identify marks \perp and || as respectively the workmen Kasa and Mose.⁷²

Five years later, a review of McDowell's work was published by Mounir Megally who discussed the ostraca with day numbers and marks at some length as well, as he believed they had not received the attention they deserved. The lack of interest in ostraca with marks was attributed to a number of factors: the apparent absence of a "verbal or non-verbal grammatical structure", as well as the lack of data about the nature of the activities that the ostraca record.⁷³ He noted that the "signs" ("signes") were of a particular palaeography that separated them from hieratic signs.⁷⁴ When compared to well-known hieratic administrative documents, the style in which the ostraca with marks were produced were in the opinion of Megally evidence of a difference in professional quality. He sought out the meaning and function of the marked ostraca in these characteristics: that the ostraca structurally displayed hands which he described as "hesitant" and "little experienced" meant that they were created by apprentice scribes who produced the documents as the first steps in their training.⁷⁵

workmen's marks, see Pierre Grandet, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médîneh XI. Nos. 10124-10275*. DFIFAO 48 (Cairo 2010), 228.

⁶⁷ 'Dr. Hawass in the Valley of Kings: The new inscribed finds (Part 2 of 2)', a video shot by Sandro Vannini and Nico Piazza for Heritage Key. Accessible via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSTMyBuinPc>.

⁶⁸ Annie Gasse, 'L'inventaire des ostraca littéraires de Deir el-Médîna conservés à l'IFAO. Premiers résultats' *GM* 174 (2000), 7.

⁶⁹ Robert J. Demarée, *Ramesside Ostraca* (London 2002), 19, O. BM 5642; 21, O. BM 5861; 22-23, O. BM 14214.

⁷⁰ Richard Parkinson, *Cracking codes. The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (London 1999), 93.

⁷¹ Explicated in a private letter written to Rob Demarée (see above, p. 9 and n. 48) who discussed its content with McDowell.

⁷² Andrea G. McDowell, *Hieratic Ostraca from the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow (The Colin Campbell Ostraca)* (Oxford 1993), 4-5; 19-20; this genre of ostraca with marks will be the main focus of chapter 3, where McDowell's ideas will be examined in more detail.

⁷³ Mounir Megally, review of McDowell, *Hieratic Ostraca*, in: *CdE* 73 (1998), 276.

⁷⁴ Megally, review of McDowell, *Hieratic Ostraca*, 275-276.

⁷⁵ Megally, review of McDowell, *Hieratic Ostraca*, 276; 279.

Regarding the marks on the ostraca Megally deduced that it was probable that the marks referred to the individuals involved in a particular action.⁷⁶ Yet, Megally disagreed with McDowell's proposition that these individuals were workmen, and he refuted the identifications of Kasa and Mose because "un nom propre, même abrégé, est toujours noté avec un déterminatif, A1 ou B1; sémantiquement, c'est une partie intégrante du nom propre." Therefore, it seemed more likely to the reviewer to explain the marks as indicators of groups of individuals. Young scribes would not yet have been able to write proper names, and hence employed marks that are also attested on other objects and ostraca from Deir el-Medina. Megally suggested that such groups of workmen were each controlled by a supervisor or a scribe, each with their own mark, a representation of a certain object.⁷⁷

The discussions of McDowell and Megally drew the attention of Ben Haring,⁷⁸ who another five years later succeeded for the first time to prove beyond any doubt that the signs inscribed on these ostraca with semi-hieratic calendar dates as discussed by McDowell and Megally, were in fact identity marks, each referring to a single workman of the royal tomb. Drawing upon McDowell's assumption that the ostraca represented duty rosters, Haring was able to suggest four possible dates for the marks on the concave side O. Berlin P 12625, thus far unpublished. Moreover, he tentatively identified the individuals behind several marks on that and other ostraca with calendar dates and identity marks. Haring also signalled the possibility that workmen could have adopted their identity marks from their predecessors.⁷⁹ He went on to suggest that this type of ostraca with identity marks should "be regarded as a type of administrative records that could be understood by illiterate, or rather semi-literate people [...]."⁸⁰

Haring's breakthrough prompted further interest in the study of ostraca with workmen's marks. In 2006 a conference with as its topic marking systems in Ancient Egypt and elsewhere was organised in Leiden, with a follow-up in Berlin in the subsequent year. The proceedings of the former conference included two papers on the Deir el-Medina workmen's marks. David Aston addressed the question as to whether the marks found on pottery from Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Kings represent identity marks or not.⁸¹ After a cursory overview of the different theories regarding the meaning of potmarks in ancient Egypt, he noted that one should distinguish between pre-firing and post-firing potmarks, as Nagel had done before him. It is generally accepted that the latter category is mostly connected with ownership: these potmarks represent the owner of a vessel, not its manufacturer. Comparing the post-fired potmarks from Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Kings to the identity marks on ostraca from the same location, Aston found them to be identical. Based on the provenance and typology of the ceramic vessels, he attributed identity marks to the various periods, such as the reigns of Ramesses II, Siptah, Ramesses III and Ramesses IV.⁸² Aston remarked furthermore that among the vessels of the workmen of Deir el-Medina the number of potmarks is exceptionally high.⁸³ As a possible explanation he

⁷⁶ Megally, review of McDowell, *Hieratic Ostraca*, 279-280.

⁷⁷ Megally, review of McDowell, *Hieratic Ostraca*, 280.

⁷⁸ Ben J.J. Haring, 'Towards decoding the necropolis workmen's funny signs' *GM* 178 (2000), 45-58.

⁷⁹ Haring, 'Decoding the necropolis workmen's funny signs', 51.

⁸⁰ Haring, 'Decoding the necropolis workmen's funny signs', 55.

⁸¹ David A. Aston, 'Theban potmarks – nothing other than funny signs? Potmarks from Deir el-Medineh and the Valley of the Kings' in: B.J.J. Haring and O.E. Kaper (eds.), *Pictograms or Pseudo Script? Non-textual identity marks in practical use in Ancient Egypt and elsewhere. Proceedings of a conference in Leiden, 19-20 December 2006*. EU 25 (Leuven and Leiden 2009), 49-65.

⁸² Aston, 'Theban potmarks', 59-61.

⁸³ Aston, 'Theban potmarks', 52. It is doubtful if this statement still holds true because large bodies of ceramic vessels and vessels fragments with marks – which need not all have had the same function – have been identified at various other locations as well, see e.g. Barbara Ditze, 'Gedrückt – Geritzt – Gekratzt. Die Gefäße mit Topfmarken' in: Edgar B. Pusch and Manfred Bietak (eds.), *Die Keramik des Grabungsplatzes Q 1. Teil 2*.

stated that the community of workmen lived and worked under unusual circumstances: “[W]ith the Deir el-Medineh workforce we have a group of men who went away from their village to work in the Valley of the Kings for periods of 10 days at a time, where in a more communal and probably more regimented working environment, certain individuals may have felt the need to mark their own property”.⁸⁴ Additionally, Aston too found indications that the identity marks could be inherited or re-assigned.⁸⁵

In a first progress report⁸⁶ of his research on ostraca with workmen’s marks, Haring concurred with Aston – and in fact with several scholars before him – that the marks on ceramic vessels from Western Thebes and the marks on ostraca are both identity marks of the workmen of the royal tomb. He noted furthermore that the same identity marks also occur in graffiti and on other object from the workmen’s settlement and cemetery.⁸⁷ This assumption has since been generally accepted. Concentrating on ostraca with workmen’s marks, Haring categorised the documents known to him at the time on the basis of their layout,⁸⁸ and continued to demonstrate that ostraca were inscribed with marks during the 18th, 19th and 20th Dynasties. He dated several ostraca with marks to the time of Ramesses III on the basis of marks that also appear on ostraca with duty rosters.⁸⁹ Moreover, it was shown that ostraca with marks dating to the 18th Dynasty are recognisable on the basis of layout, style, and the repertory of marks. Some groups of ostraca from this time were dated to a specific reign on account of their provenance in the Valley of the Kings,⁹⁰ and two ostraca were assigned a date in the 19th Dynasty.⁹¹ In another paper, Haring explored the nature and development of workmen’s marks on ostraca, detecting an increase in the scribal character of such ostraca over time.⁹² Later, the significance of the 18th Dynasty marks ostraca for the understanding of the organisation and administration of the crew of workmen during that time was highlighted by Haring. It was pointed out that the number of different marks per ostrakon or per group of ostraca from a single findspot can be indicative of the size of the workforce.⁹³

*Schaber – Marken – Scherben. Die Grabungen des Pelizaeus-Museums Hildesheim in Qantir – Pi-Ramesse Band 5 (Hildesheim 2007), 270-507; for potmarks from the Early Dynastic Period, see e.g. Edwin C.M. van den Brink, ‘The international potmark workshop. Progressing from Toulouse to London in the study of Predynastic and Early Dynastic potmarks’ in: Renée F. Friedman and Peter N. Fiske (eds.), *Egypt at its Origins 3. Proceedings of the Third International Conference “Origin of the State. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt”, London, 27th July – 1st August 2008*. OLA 205 (Leuven, Paris and Walpole 2011), 1005-1013; Gâelle Bréand, ‘The corpus of pre-firing potmarks from Adaïma (Upper Egypt)’ in: Friedman and Fiske (eds.), *Egypt at its Origins 3*, 1015-1041; Lisa Mawdsley, ‘The corpus of potmarks from Tarkhan’, in: Friedman and Fiske (eds.), *Egypt at its Origins 3*, 1043-1071; Anna Wodzinska, ‘Potmarks from Early Dynasty Buto and Old Kingdom Giza: Their occurrence and economic significance’, in: Friedman and Fiske (eds.), *Egypt at its Origins 3*, 1073-1096.*

⁸⁴ Aston, ‘Theban potmarks’, 54.

⁸⁵ Aston, ‘Theban potmarks’, 55.

⁸⁶ Ben J.J. Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks on Ostraca from the Theban Necropolis: A Progress Report’ in: B.J.J. Haring and O.E. Kaper (eds.), *Pictograms or Pseudo Script? Non-textual identity marks in practical use in Ancient Egypt and elsewhere. Proceedings of a conference in Leiden, 19-20 December 2006*. EU 25 (Leuven and Leiden 2009), 143-167.

⁸⁷ Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks on Ostraca’, 143.

⁸⁸ Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks on Ostraca’, 145-146.

⁸⁹ Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks on Ostraca’, 150-152.

⁹⁰ Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks on Ostraca’, 152-154.

⁹¹ Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks on Ostraca’, 154-156.

⁹² Ben J.J. Haring, ‘On the Nature of Workmen’s Marks of the Royal Necropolis Administration in the New Kingdom’ in: Petra Andrassy, Julia Budka and Frank Kammerzell (eds.), *Non-Textual Marking Systems, Writing and Pseudo Script from Prehistory to Modern Times*. LingAeg SM 8 (Göttingen 2009), 123-135.

⁹³ Ben J.J. Haring, ‘Workmen’s Marks and the Early History of the Theban Necropolis’ in: Jaana Toivari-Viitala, Turo Vartiainen and Sara Uvanto (eds.), *Deir el-Medina Studies. Helsinki June 24–26, 2009. Proceedings*. FESOP (Helsinki 2014), 95-96.

Haring's conclusion that the marks from the Royal Necropolis were identity marks that referred to workmen inspired a number of scholars to explore the use and meaning of the marks. One particular category of ostraca that depict pieces of furniture together with workmen's marks, dubbed 'furniture ostraca', was discussed in a paper by Geoffrey Killen and Lara Weiss. The ostraca were interpreted as accounts of business transactions documenting the objects of the transaction as well as their producer(s) and/or recipient(s).⁹⁴

Around the same period, Maria Fronczak and Sławomir Rzepka conducted a study on the identity marks that were carved in the Theban mountains by the necropolis workmen. Fronczak and Rzepka identified c. 600 of such instances. In a jointly written paper they noted that marks appear on their own as well as in bigger and smaller groups. Fronczak and Rzepka supported the idea that the marks represent identities by pointing out that the greater majority of textual graffiti consist of proper names. Occasionally a hieratic inscription containing proper names was found close to workmen's marks, but oftentimes it could not be established whether the hieratic text and the marks formed a single inscription. The authors analysed the spatial correlations between workmen's marks and proper names in the graffiti of the Theban mountains in an attempt to link individuals with their corresponding identity marks. Interpretation of the results of this analysis was not without difficulties, but at least in the cases of Amennakht (vi)/(xii) and Hay (vii) a matching workmen's mark was found.⁹⁵

Identity marks were also discussed in Andreas Dorn's publication of finds made during the (re)excavation of the workmen's huts near the tomb of Ramesses X. The material included several jar stoppers, ostraca and ceramic vessels inscribed with workmen's marks.⁹⁶ In the opinion of Dorn, a mark can be seen as abbreviated writing of a name, while that sign is not necessarily connected with the name in a phonetic or graphic way. The marks were not referred to as 'workmen's marks' because the marks are used in other contexts besides the work on the tomb. Instead, the term 'name signs', "Namenszeichen" was employed as "hinter jedem Zeichen ein Name verbirgt".⁹⁷ Dorn put forward the idea that the marks enabled semi-literate workmen to possess simple administrative documents, or documents of private property or debt, independent of an official scribe. Moreover, he proposed that smaller ostraca inscribed with a single mark could have functioned in the same way as so-called 'name stones'.⁹⁸ Dorn identified over 90 different marks but noted that in almost all cases it was impossible to connect them with the individual workmen that the marks represent.

It is certainly due to the fact that the identity marks are currently much better understood that they are no longer ignored. In addition, scholars have come to realise that the study of ostraca with workmen's marks has the potential to shed light on prosopographical issues and on events that are not recorded in hieratic documentation.⁹⁹ The study of the

⁹⁴ Geoffrey Killen and Lara Weiss, 'Markings on Objects of Daily Use from Deir el-Medina. Ownership Marks or Administrative Aids?' in: Andrásy, Budka and Kammerzell (eds.), *Non-Textual Marking Systems*, 137-158. For this type of ostraca see chapter 4, 4.3.3.3.

⁹⁵ Maria Fronczak and Sławomir Rzepka, "Funny Signs" in Theban Rock Graffiti" in: Andrásy, Budka and Kammerzell (eds.), *Non-Textual Marking Systems*, 159-178. For these graffiti, see chapter 4, 4.2.6.

⁹⁶ For a general discussion see Andreas Dorn, *Arbeiterhütten im Tal der Könige. Ein Beitrag zur altägyptische Sozialgeschichte aufgrund von neuem Quellenmaterial aus der Mitte der 20. Dynastie (ca. 1150 v. Chr. 1 Text- und Katalogband und 2 Tafelbände*. AH 23 (Basel 2011), 139-141.

⁹⁷ Dorn, *Arbeiterhütten*, 139.

⁹⁸ On this matter, see chapter 2, 2.3.4.5, chapter 5, 5.3.2.4 and particularly chapter 4, 4.3.3.4.

⁹⁹ As illustrated by recent papers, such as Mark Collier, 'The right side of the gang in years 1 to 2 of Ramesses IV' in: Ben J.J. Haring, Olaf E. Kaper and René van Walsem (eds.), *The workman's progress. Studies in the Village of Deir el-Medina and Other Documents from Western Thebes in Honour of Rob Demarée*. EU 28 (Leuven and Leiden 2014), 11-12; 20; Ben J.J. Haring and Daniel Soliman, 'Reading twentieth Dynasty ostraca with workmen's marks' in: Haring, Kaper and Van Walsem (eds.), *The workman's progress*, 73-93; Kathrin Gabler, 'Can I Stay or must I go? Relations between the Deir el-Medina Community and their Service Personnel', in: Andreas Dorn and Stéphan Polis (eds.), *Proceedings of the Conference "Deir el-Medina and the*

Theban identity marks indeed has much to offer to the scholar interested in the history of the Royal Necropolis workmen, as well as to academics from other fields involved in research on the use of non-textual marking systems. To this end, a four-year research project called ‘Symbolizing Identity. Identity marks and their relation to writing in New Kingdom Egypt’ was established in 2011 under the supervision of Ben Haring.¹⁰⁰ Together with Kyra van der Moezel and the author of this work, hundreds of ostraca with identity marks were analysed, in many cases for the first time, and collected in an online database. Besides several publications and two conferences in Leiden,¹⁰¹ the present work is one of the outcomes of the research project.

The research project has confirmed that the identity marks of the Royal Necropolis are signs that refer to persons. They occur in many different shapes. Several marks appear to be abstract geometrical forms, but a large number of marks are signs or sign groups that are borrowed from hieroglyphic script, or less frequently, from hieratic script. These signs can be read, and the phonetic value that they retain is often related to the name of the workman who possessed that mark. Nevertheless, the marks differ from the characters of script in the sense that a very intimate connection exists between the signifier (the mark) and the referent (the identity of the individual the mark refers to). First and foremost that connection is established by the fact that the referent had either chosen the sign himself, or because it had come down to him via a close family member.¹⁰² Unlike the characters of most forms of script, the spectrum of possibilities of identity marks is very limited, because they refer only to individuals and cannot be combined to form words or sentences by themselves. In contrast to most forms of script, the meaning of a mark is to a large extent conditioned by its physical and temporal context. A mark may have referred to a particular individual at a certain time, but one generation later it could represent someone else. Because a particular mark was sometimes in use by two different individuals, it is its environment – physically or within a particular document – that lends it its significance.

Apart from identity marks, we will encounter other signs that were created by the users of the identity marks, signs that refer not to individuals, but to elements such as commodities, parts of the crew, months and a religious institution. Such signs were invented because several individuals that employed identity marks on ostraca to create records felt impeded by the restricted possibilities of the identity marks. In combination with these other signs, as well as with dots, strokes, and drawings of objects, the identity marks were effectively used in a way that very closely approaches writing. The question whether these inscriptions can be categorised as script will not be of concern to us here; in this work we shall be occupied with the meaning of these inscriptions and their functional context.¹⁰³

In this study an attempt will be made to establish the meaning of ostraca inscribed with marks and to determine the information that is conveyed by these documents. Ostraca

Theban Necropolis in Contact: Describing the Interactions Within and Outside the Community of Workmen, October 2014, Liège (forthcoming); Kathrin Gabler, ‘Methods of Identification among the Deir el-Medina Workmen and their Service Personnel: The Use of Names, Titles, Patronyms and Identity Marks in Administrative Texts from Deir el-Medina’, in: Ben J.J. Haring *et al.* (eds.), *Decoding Signs of Identity. Egyptian Workmen’s Marks in Archaeological, Historical, Comparative and Theoretical Perspective. Proceedings of a conference in Leiden, December 13-15 December 2013* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁰ Kyra van der Moezel and Daniel Soliman, ‘Workmen’s marks from the Theban necropolis’ *GM* 231 (2011), 7-9.

¹⁰¹ Conference *Decoding Signs of Identity. Egyptian Workmen’s Marks in Archaeological, Historical, Comparative and Theoretical Perspective* (Leiden, December 13-15 2013); Conference *The Idea of Writing: Beyond Speech?* (Leiden, October 24-25, 2014).

¹⁰² Some nuances to this statement are presented in chapter 6, 6.5.3 and 6.5.4.

¹⁰³ This question is part of the discussion of the second study of the research project ‘Symbolizing Identity’, and is treated by Kyra van der Moezel, *On Marks and Meaning. The Identity Marks from Deir el-Medina. A palaeographic, comparative and semiotic-cognitive analysis*. PhD Dissertation (Leiden 2015).

with marks will be analysed through a close comparison of the ostraca with hieratic administrative texts as well as textual graffiti. Besides identifying the workmen to whom the marks refer, this work revolves around the question what the purpose was of ostraca with marks. It shall be investigated why ostraca with marks were composed and by whom.

To this end a study of the history of the practice of using marks on ostraca is required. The origins of the practice will be retraced to ascertain when it was introduced in the community of necropolis workmen. Dating the individual ostraca will be an essential part of this work, as it will provide us with insights into the continuity and the development of the usage of ostraca with marks, and thereby into the significance of the practice to the users themselves and the extent to which it was embraced by the workmen.

To the best of our capabilities we shall scrutinise who these users were. An evident question is why of all places the necropolis workmen of Deir el-Medina employed marks to create documents, since this is the location that is most famed for its relatively large number of literate inhabitants. Based primarily on the situation of the first half of the 20th Dynasty, studies have deduced that about 25% to 30% or 40% of the necropolis workmen were “fully literate”,¹⁰⁴ a rate that is thought to have been exceptionally high for ancient Egyptian society.¹⁰⁵ Simultaneously it has been remarked that there are many gradations between complete proficiency in reading and writing of different types of texts on one side of the spectrum, and complete ignorance of the meaning and use of the characters of script on the other.¹⁰⁶ One of the aims of this work will be to examine the usage of identity marks within the context of literacies at Deir el-Medina. We will try to assess the degree to which the users of identity marks were literate, and we will investigate if and to what extent writing in the Royal Necropolis was influential in the practice of composing ostraca with marks and on the development of this custom. Through these endeavours we also intend to accumulate sufficient information to describe the various mechanisms behind the conception of individual identity marks and their transference from one necropolis workmen to another.

Prior to a study of the ostraca with marks from the Theban Necropolis, the origins of the marking system itself will be explored in chapter 1. The earliest ostraca with marks date to the 18th Dynasty, and are treated in chapter 2. Because relatively little is known about the social lives of the 18th Dynasty workmen and about the organisation and administration of work on the royal tomb at this time, these matters will first be addressed in chapter 1. Chapter 3 and chapter 4 both deal with the ostraca from the 20th Dynasty before moving on to documents of the 19th Dynasty, which are analysed in chapter 5. This non-chronological treatment of the ostraca is required because only through comprehension of the ostraca from the 20th Dynasty are we able to interpret and understand the ostraca from the preceding period. The final chapter 6 summarises the findings of the study and presents general conclusions about the meaning and purpose of the ostraca with marks, its development, and its users. It will pay special attention to the question of literacy among the workmen of the Royal Necropolis as well as the systems of transference of marks.

¹⁰⁴ Depending on whether the agents of the *smd.t* personnel are included into the calculation or not; see John Baines and Christopher J. Eyre, ‘Four notes on literacy’ *GM* 61 (1983), 86-91; Jac. J. Janssen, ‘Literacy and Letters at Deir el-Medina’ in: Robert J. Demarée and Arno Egberts (eds.), *Village Voices. Proceedings of the symposium ‘Texts from Deir el-Medina and their interpretation.’ Leiden, May 31 - June, 1, 1991.* CNWS Publications 13 (Leiden 1992), 81-91.

¹⁰⁵ Baines and Eyre, ‘Four notes on literacy’, 90; Janssen, ‘Literacy and Letters’, 82; Ben Haring, ‘From Oral Practice to Written Record in Ramesside Deir El-Medina’ *JESHO* 46.3 (2003), 250.

¹⁰⁶ Janssen, ‘Literacy and Letters’, 81.

An attempt has been made to collect all ostraca with identity marks, but it is certainly possible that more pieces are still hidden in collections around the world.¹⁰⁷ An online database compiled as part of the research project ‘Symbolizing Identity’¹⁰⁸ includes all ostraca with marks that are part of this study, as well as graffiti and objects from the Royal Necropolis that display identity marks. It will aid the reader of this work by providing images of the ostraca and documents as well as various metadata and a primary bibliography. In addition, three appendices are supplied with this study. Appendix I comprises brief discussions of the date of some of the ostraca with marks that are not of crucial importance to the arguments laid out in the main text. In Appendix II the reader will find hand-copies of the ostraca the author was able to examine in person. The ostraca in question are kept in the collections of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (University College London), the Egyptian Museum in Turin, and the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo. Also included are hand-copies of four ostraca on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Appendix III contains translations of the duty and delivery ostraca that are discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁷ Not included in this study are a small number of poorly preserved ostraca inscribed with a very small number of identity marks (often no more than one) that cannot be dated accurately, as well as ostraca inscribed with signs that are perhaps marks. Hand-copies of these documents are included in Appendix II: ONL 198; ONL 233; ONL 319; ONL 611; ONL 1527; ONL 1677; ONL 6190; ONL 6230; ONL 6253; ONL 6254; ONL 6276; ONL 6309; ONL 6310; ONL 6327; ONL 6328; ONL 6329; ONL 6344; ONL 6355; ONL 6356; ONL 6360; ONL 6361; ONL 6364; ONL 6373; ONL 6375; ONL 6376; ONL 6378; ONL 6379; ONL 6380; ONL 6381; ONL 6382; ONL 6383; ONL 6384; ONL 6385; ONL 6386; ONL 6388; ONL 6389; ONL 6396; ONL 6407; ONL 6409; ONL 6421; ONL 6432; ONL 6442; ONL 6456; ONL 6460; ONL 6464; ONL 6466; ONL 6490; ONL 6498; ONL 6503; ONL 6521; ONL 6534; ONL 6542; ONL 6550; ONL 6552; ONL 6553; ONL 6557; ONL 6561; ONL 6570; ONL 6577; ONL 6578; ONL 6590; ONL 6592; ONL 6593; ONL 6597; ONL 6604; ONL 6605; ONL 6606; ONL 6617; ONL 6631; ONL 6633; ONL 6636; ONL 6638; ONL 6683; ONL 6689; ONL 6695; ONL 6738; ONL 6747; Inv. C 1404; Inv. C 1810; Inv. C 7576; Inv. C 7637; Inv. C 7639; O. Turin N. 57538.

¹⁰⁸ marks.wepwawet.nl (username: test; password: xxxxxx).

