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### **Citation**

Haring, B. J. J. (2022). Late Twentieth Dynasty ostraca and the end of the necropolis workmen's settlement at Deir el-Medina. In S. Töpfer, P. Del Vesco, & F. Poole (Eds.), *Deir el-Medina through the kaleidoscope. Proceedings of the international workshop Turin 8th-10th October 2018* (pp. 44-62). Modena: Museo Egizio en Franco Cosimo Panini Editore. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3449149>

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# LATE TWENTIETH-DYNASTY OSTRACA AND THE END OF THE NECROPOLIS WORKMEN'S SETTLEMENT AT DEIR EL-MEDINA<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

An often-repeated statement in Egyptological literature with respect to the necropolis workmen's community at Deir el-Medina is that the entire community moved away from their settlement at Deir el-Medina at some point in the reign of Ramesses XI, and went to live within the temple precinct of Medinet Habu. But evidence so far presented for this development is circumstantial, and recent investigations point to the continued presence at Deir el-Medina of a group of persons, possibly a large group, after the beginning of the *whm-msw.t*. Indications for their presence are provided by ostraca found at the site, some in hieratic, and some in a pseudo-written code including workmen's identity marks. The ostraca of both categories follow documentary conventions that are well-known from earlier parts of the Twentieth Dynasty.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Rob Demarée for reading a draft version of this paper and suggesting improvements. Elizabeth Bettles has kindly corrected my English. The flaws that remain are, of course, my own.

## 1. DEIR EL-MEDINA ABANDONED?

In a well-known passage in one of the so-called Late Ramesside Letters, the senior scribe of the Tomb Thutmose describes his and a fellow scribe's situation as follows:

*Now we are dwelling here in the Temple, and you know the manner in which we dwell, both within and without. Now the young of the Necropolis have returned. They are dwelling in Thebes, while I am dwelling here alone with the scribe of the army Pentahutnakht. Please have the men of the Necropolis who are there in Thebes assembled and send them to me to this side. List of them: ...*<sup>2</sup>

The letter was dated by Edward Wente to the early years of the *whm-msw.t* or “Renaissance”, that is, in the early eleventh century BCE. The situation it refers to appears to be an exceptional, or at the very least an undesirable one in the mind of Thutmose. Indeed, the actual dwelling place of the royal necropolis workforce and its administration used to be the settlement of Deir el-Medina throughout the Ramesside Period. Egyptologists have long adhered to the idea that the community of royal necropolis workmen and their administrators moved from that settlement to the temple precinct of Medinet Habu in the late Twentieth Dynasty. According to Dominique Valbelle's outstanding book *Les ouvriers de la Tombe* of 1985, the workmen were living there by year 17 of Ramesses XI at the latest; that is, even before the *whm-msw.t*.<sup>3</sup> The evidence adduced for that assertion consists of mentions of food distribution to the workmen in the temple in year 17,<sup>4</sup> remarks concerning the necropolis scribes Thutmose and Nesamenope as interrogators in tomb robbery investigations,<sup>5</sup> and supposed allusions to the abandonment of the workmen's settlement in the Late Ramesside Letters.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, none of these textual references constitute real evidence, and even as mere indications they are rather unsubstantial. That food distributions took

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<sup>2</sup> P. Berlin P 10494 (= LRL no. 12) recto 6-10; this translation by Wente, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 1967, p. 44. See *The Deir el-Medina Database* for references to editions of hieratic documentary ostraca and papyri relating to the royal necropolis workmen of the Ramesside Period.

<sup>3</sup> Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, 1985, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> P. Turin Cat. 1888 recto l 2 and 7. Note, however, that the functionaries mentioned in the context of the distributions are the vizier and treasury officials.

<sup>5</sup> P. BM EA 10052 recto l 19 (Nesamenope), V 14 (Thutmose); Peet, *Great Tomb-Robberies*, 1930, pp. 143 and 148.

<sup>6</sup> Letters 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, and 28; see note 9 below.

place in the temple may mean nothing more than that the food was (temporarily) stored there, as two slightly earlier papyri make clear for shipments of grain.<sup>7</sup> Even if tomb robbery interrogations took place in the temple (which is by no means certain),<sup>8</sup> this does not say anything about the living quarters of the necropolis administrators as interrogators, or of their workmen, at that time. In addition, the references in the Late Ramesside Letters are rather vague, perhaps with the exception of the one quoted above.<sup>9</sup>

Jaroslav Černý already stated, in his posthumously published work *A Community of Workmen at Thebes* (1973), that the workmen were living within the Medinet Habu temple enclosure during the reign of Ramesses XI, and explained the disappearance of water-carriers from grain distribution lists as a consequence of the workmen's move from their own settlement to the temple. As opposed to the workmen's settlement, the temple complex had a water well, so that the services of water-carriers, an important feature of life at Deir el-Medina in earlier years, were no longer necessary.<sup>10</sup> Other possibly relevant observations have been made in recent discussions. These include the virtual or complete disappearance from the records of woodcutters,<sup>11</sup> the workmen's own supposed administrative centre (*htm*) and their watch rota (*wrš*).<sup>12</sup> Another possibly relevant circumstance noted is the reduced size of the workforce under Ramesses XI as

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<sup>7</sup> Temple storerooms filled with grain for the necropolis workforce are mentioned in P. Turin Cat. 2018 verso A II 1 and verso C 8 (years 8-10 of Ramesses XI); P. Turin Cat. 1895 + 2006 ("Taxation Papyrus") recto II 6, III 7, V 4 (year 12 of Ramesses XI). See also Haring, *Divine Households*, 1997, pp. 278-79, where I still adhered to the idea of the workmen dwelling within the temple precinct.

<sup>8</sup> The location is specified in P. BM EA 10052 recto I 3 as *ht*, tentatively translated as "forecourt(?)" by Peet, *Great Tomb-Robberies*, 1930, p. 142 with note 1.

<sup>9</sup> In nos. 4 (P. Turin Cat. 1972) and 5 (P. Leiden I 370), Thutmose asks his son Butehamun and others to pray to the gods of Medinet Habu. I fail to see the relevance of the "soldiers" in these letters, who are not to flee or to hunger, or the well-being of "people" in no. 8, to the whereabouts of the necropolis workmen. In no. 9 (P. BM EA 10326), Thutmose talks about papyri having been retrieved from his grandfather's *ḥ.t*, where they had become wet by rain, and deposited in the tomb of his great-grandfather. The word *ḥ.t* may refer to a workshop or office (Demarée, in Dorn and Hofmann [eds.], *Living and Writing*, 2006, pp. 65-66), rather than a "house" as it was translated by Wente, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 1967, p. 38. The retrieval of papyri from there does not necessarily indicate that the *ḥ.t* itself had been abandoned, nor that it was located in the workmen's settlement. No. 12 (P. Berlin P 10494), already mentioned above, was sent by Thutmose and Pentahutnakht; according to the same text, the latter was attached to the temple. In no. 28 (P. BM EA 10375), the necropolis scribe Butehamun talks about "people" he brought back from Thebes.

<sup>10</sup> Černý, *Community of Workmen*, 1973, p. 190. See, however, the discussion of O. DeM 256 below.

<sup>11</sup> Very few of which are known from the reign of Ramesses XI: Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, pp. 544-45.

<sup>12</sup> Eyre, *Use of Documents*, 2013, pp. 248-49. The latest known attestation of men on *wrš* duty is in year 3 of Ramesses X; see Haring, in Julia Budka et al. (eds.), *Non-Textual Marking Systems*, 2015, pp. 136-37.

adduced from P. Turin Cat. 2018 dated to his year 10, which lists a group of merely sixteen workmen, whereas there were forty in year 17 of Ramesses IX.<sup>13</sup> It is thought that the larger size of the workforce under Ramesses IX would have made it difficult to live within the limited space of the temple enclosure.<sup>14</sup> However their reduction in later years does not necessarily mean that the workmen were indeed living at Medinet Habu.

Evidence exists for *smd.t*, the supporting personnel of the necropolis workforce, living at or near Medinet Habu, in the form of lists written on the back of two Tomb-Robbery papyri.<sup>15</sup> These lists do not include any explicit references to necropolis *workmen*. The list of P. BM EA 10068, dated to year 12 of Ramesses XI, includes houses of a “scribe Thutmose” (verso VI 21) and the “scribe of the Tomb Iufenamun” (verso VII 8). It is possible, but not certain, that the former is the necropolis scribe Thutmose.<sup>16</sup> The latter must be the *smd.t* scribe Iufenamun, who is well-attested in necropolis records.<sup>17</sup> The list also mentions houses of the *ꜥt.w* Anuynakht and the physician Minkhau (verso III 8-9). The latter title is known to have been borne by necropolis workmen in addition to their daily tasks, and indeed, a workman/physician Minkhau is well-known from necropolis records.<sup>18</sup> The combination workman/*ꜥt.w* is less certain,<sup>19</sup> and an *ꜥt.w* Anuynakht is otherwise unknown. An *ꜥt.w* called Amenkhau is also mentioned (verso III 9), but equally difficult to connect with the necropolis workforce.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to (possible) textual references to the necropolis workmen, their *smd.t* and their administration, there are several historical circumstances in the

<sup>13</sup> For changes in the size of the necropolis workforce see Davies, in Di Biase-Dyson and Donovan (eds.), *Cultural Manifestations*, 2017, pp. 205–12. See also Peden, in Demarée and Egberts (eds.), *Deir el-Medina in the Third Millennium*, 2000, pp. 287–90.

<sup>14</sup> Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, 1985, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> P. BM EA 10054 verso II-V (list of persons) and 10068 verso II-VIII (list of houses): Janssen, *AltOrForsch* 19 (1992), pp. 8–23; Haring, *Divine Households*, 1997, pp. 279–80; Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, pp. 24, 513–24, 545–46.

<sup>16</sup> Given the occurrences of a “scribe Thutmose, son of Userhat” in documents of the late Twentieth Dynasty: Černý, *Community of Workmen*, 1973, p. 361; Janssen, *AltOrForsch* 19 (1992), p. 12. The father of “our” Thutmose was Khaemhedjet.

<sup>17</sup> Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, pp. 413, 429, 514 (note 1944), 714.

<sup>18</sup> Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, pp. 400–01, 405, 513–14, note 1944.

<sup>19</sup> Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, pp. 431–32.

<sup>20</sup> A man with the same name and the title “*ꜥt.w* of Western Thebes” is mentioned in a list of witnesses (P. Geneva D 409 + Turin Cat. 2021 recto IV, late Twentieth Dynasty), together with other *ꜥt.w*, policemen, a district scribe, a mayor, priests of Medinet Habu, necropolis and army administrators.

late Twentieth Dynasty that might be regarded as encouraging, or even as effectively compelling the workmen to move out of their desert settlement near the Valley of the Kings. One such circumstance is the termination of royal tomb construction in the Valley of the Kings under Ramesses XI (KV 4), whose own tomb remained unfinished like that of his predecessor Ramesses X (KV 18). Since the tombs of these kings do not seem to have been made ready for burial,<sup>21</sup> and their mummies were not among the royal mummies discovered in the two caches where these had been reburied after the end of the New Kingdom, it is even doubtful whether they were buried in the Theban royal necropolis. If royal tomb construction no longer provided workmen with employment in the Valley of the Kings, there was perhaps less reason to maintain the settlement of Deir el-Medina, which was adjacent to it.

Other reasons may have been insecurity, and perhaps even danger, caused by an attack on the high priest of Amun-Re by the viceroy of Nubia (even involving a raid or siege on Medinet Habu),<sup>22</sup> and by the presence of Libyan groups as mentioned in necropolis records from the reigns of Ramesses IX and X.<sup>23</sup> It remains unclear if these groups genuinely presented a threat to the workmen, but work at the royal tomb was interrupted whenever they appeared. References to Libyans (*Mšwš*) in the Late Ramesside Letters seem rather to relate to soldiers in the service of General Payankh, who were to be given food rations.<sup>24</sup> Even as such, their presence may have been intimidating or outright dangerous, as the viceroy's Nubian soldiers had been before.<sup>25</sup>

Just like the references to the necropolis workforce and their administrators during the reign of Ramesses XI, the historical developments outlined in the previous two paragraphs constitute circumstantial evidence. The former may hint at the abandonment of Deir el-Medina, and the latter may provide an explanation for the supposed abandonment, but both do not necessarily substantiate

<sup>21</sup> Dodson, in Wilkinson and Weeks (eds.), *Oxford Handbook*, 2016, pp. 225–27.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps in the early reign of Ramesses XI; Barwik, *Twilight of Ramesside Egypt*, 2011, pp. 77–110.

<sup>23</sup> Haring, in Demarée and Egberts (eds.), *Village Voices*, 1992, pp. 71–80.

<sup>24</sup> As is especially clear from no. 19 (P. Bibliothèque Nationale 196, I), in which the necropolis scribe Thutmose is ordered by the general to have rations of bread supplied to the *Mšwš*. Cf. the references to soldiers in nos. 4 and 5 (see note 9 above). The “great ones of the *Mšwš*” in P. BM EA 75019 + 10302 were probably Payankh's troops or allies; see Demarée, *Banks Late Ramesside Papyri*, 2006, pp. 14–19.

<sup>25</sup> A foreigner (lit. “jabberer”, *ꜥꜥ*) of the “battalion of Kush” is mentioned in P. BM EA 10052 verso I 25 (= “page 8” in Peet, *Great Tomb-Robberies*, 1930, pl. XXX). The raid on Medinet Habu was also by *ꜥꜥ.w* according to P. Mayer A verso I 4 (= “page 6” in Peet, *Mayer Papyri*, 1920, p. 13 with plate).

that scenario. In fact, it remains unclear what exactly happened to the royal necropolis workforce at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty.

Thutmose's reference to his "dwelling" in the temple of Medinet Habu, with which we started this section, possibly finds archaeological support. Both he and his son, the necropolis scribe Butehamun, seem to have left inscribed monuments within the Medinet Habu precinct. In 1898, Georges Daressy published two stone doorjambs that had been found reused in a Coptic house, and which were inscribed with funerary (*hṯp di nswt*) spells. The name of the original owner had been scratched away, and over it was written that of Thutmose, preceded by the titles "scribe in the Horizon of Eternity", "scribe of the House of Amun", and "scribe [of?] all the gods of [the South and] the North [...]".<sup>26</sup> The first of these titles, which was apparently the most prominent one, indeed refers to a necropolis scribe, and so "our" Thutmose might very well be meant here, and the jambs may once have been part of a house, office or chapel of his.<sup>27</sup>

More strongly identifiable as monumental remains of a house, office or chapel belonging to Thutmose's son Butehamun are the stone columns on which his name, his father's and the titles of a necropolis scribe can be read.<sup>28</sup> The interpretation of this structure as a house is consistent with the identification by Uvo Hölscher of its immediate surroundings as a residential area of the Third Intermediate Period, but it is difficult to be certain about the precise function of the building during or after Butehamun's life. Indeed, different, even multiple functions (house, office, cultic space) have been ascribed to the structure in recent discussions.<sup>29</sup>

Additional archaeological material for Thutmose at Deir el-Medina includes a fragment of a faience canopic jar of this scribe, which was found in house C

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<sup>26</sup> Jambs Cairo JE 48832 and 48833: PM I<sup>2</sup>/2, p. 777; Daressy, *RecTrav* 20 (1898), pp. 75–76; KRI VI, 876–77 and KRI VII, 463; Hölscher, *Excavation of Medinet Habu*, V, 1954, p. 5, note 25.

<sup>27</sup> Filiactions are not given, except perhaps at the bottom of the right jamb, where "Thutmose" is followed by "Khaemwaset"(?), which according to KRI VI, p. 877, may either be the name of the original owner, or a mistake for "Khaemhedjet", the name of Thutmose's father (provided the inscription really has "Khaemwaset" – note the question mark in Daressy, *RecTrav* 20 [1898], p. 75). Thutmose's namesake (the son of Userhat, see note 16) is never mentioned with a title more specific than "scribe".

<sup>28</sup> Hölscher, *Excavation of Medinet Habu*, V, 1954, pp. 4–5, pl. 5; texts in KRI VII, 401–3. Two inscribed lintels may be from the same structure: KRI VII, 399–400; Kikuchi, *MDAIK* 58 (2002), pp. 361–63.

<sup>29</sup> See Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, 1985, p. 225; Lacovara, *New Kingdom Royal City*, 1997, p. 61; Kikuchi, *MDAIK* 58 (2002), pp. 357–63; Cavillier, in Rosati and Guidotti (eds.), *Proceedings of the XI International Congress of Egyptologists*, 2017, pp. 95–99.



V by Bernard Bruyère,<sup>30</sup> and a stela mentioning the same scribe (and possibly his father Khaemhedjet) found by Bruyère in the Hathor temple area.<sup>31</sup> These two finds suggest that the site was not entirely abandoned late in the reign of Ramesses XI. Obviously, they do not prove that anyone still lived there at that time, either. But in the next section we will see some indications for the presence of a body of workmen present there in the early years of the *whm-msw.t*. It is not known when Thutmose passed away, and where he was buried – although the fragment of one of his canopic jars from Deir el-Medina is suggestive of that site as his place of burial. It is possible that Butehamun was a senior scribe for some years together with his father, maybe already during the early *whm-msw.t*.<sup>32</sup> By the early years of the Twenty-first Dynasty, Thutmose was probably deceased, and Butehamun was taking charge of the reburials of royal mummies under the high priest Herihor.<sup>33</sup> Theban Tomb 291 at Deir el-Medina was possibly the place where Butehamun was buried and where his funerary equipment was found in the early nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. PAPYRI AND OSTRACA OF THE LATE TWENTIETH DYNASTY

It has long been assumed that the late Twentieth Dynasty saw an explosive growth in the production of hieratic documentary papyri in the Theban necropolis, whereas the production of ostraca declined. Indeed, many more papyri have survived from the final reigns of that dynasty than from the earlier Ramesside reigns. This is partly due to specific historical circumstances. The investigations of tomb and temple robberies under Ramesses IX and XI have left us the collection of papyrus documents known as the Tomb Robbery Papyri. From the late years of Ramesses XI also comes a sizeable body of correspondence on papyri, known as the Late Ramesside Letters. Apart from these two corpora there is the “regular” output of the necropolis scribes in the form

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<sup>30</sup> Bruyère, *Rapport 1934-1935*, III, 1939, p. 306, no. 2, fig. 174; KRI VI, 875.

<sup>31</sup> Bruyère, *Rapport 1935-1940*, II, 1952, pp. 118–20, no. 280, pl. XLIV, fig. 200; KRI VI, 875–76.

<sup>32</sup> Davies, *Who's Who*, 1999, p. 138.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Haring, *SAK* 41 (2012), p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> Bruyère and Kuentz, *Tombes thébaines*, 1926, p. 76; Barwik, *Twilight of Ramesside Egypt*, 2011, p. 286; Guérin, *EAO* 48 (2007), p. 18.



of journals, accounts, lists and other sorts of administrative papyri. Although papyri have been preserved from the entire Twentieth Dynasty with exception of its earliest years,<sup>35</sup> it is the second half of that Dynasty (Ramesses IX-XI) that has left us the greatest numbers, the reign of Rameses IX being particularly well-represented.<sup>36</sup> This observation has been connected with the supposed moving of the necropolis workmen to Medinet Habu, where papyri might have been available for their administration from the temple archives, but ostraca (at least those of limestone) would have been rarer.<sup>37</sup> The same move has been adduced as a partial explanation for the decrease of rock graffiti in the Theban necropolis under Ramesses IX-XI.<sup>38</sup> Yet even if such a move did indeed occur, it is not likely to have done so as early as the reign of Ramesses IX. As we have seen in the previous section, all *possible* references to it are from the reigns of his successors.

As I have recently argued, Egyptologists have probably been misled by the material preserved. The frequent reuse of papyrus as writing material has caused earlier texts to be literally “hidden” underneath later ones on the same papyri. At least forty percent of the surviving Ramesside documentary papyri have been reused. Even so, almost every single regnal year of the Twentieth Dynasty, from the late years of Ramesses III onward, is represented in one or more texts on papyrus. It is the reuse, together with the specific groups of the Tomb Robbery Papyri and the Late Ramesside Letters, that has given us the impression of an increasing production of documentary texts on papyri during the final reigns of the Twentieth Dynasty, whereas in fact no such escalation may have occurred.<sup>39</sup>

The extremely low number of ostraca datable to the same time is more difficult to understand, but also in this respect the late Twentieth Dynasty was probably not a period of sudden change. Judging from the numbers of datable hieratic documentary ostraca preserved, the decline in their production must

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<sup>35</sup> There are no papyri from the reign of Setnakht, and only a few from the first two decades of Ramesses III.

<sup>36</sup> See Haring, in van Gompel and Hoogendijk (eds.), *Materiality of Texts*, 2018, pp. 47–49, for an overview. The documents dating to the reign of Ramesses IX are currently the topic of a PhD research project by Martina Landrino; see her contribution to this volume.

<sup>37</sup> Eyre, *Use of Documents*, 2013, pp. 248–49.

<sup>38</sup> Peden, in Demarée and Egberts (eds.), *Deir el-Medina in the Third Millennium*, 2000, pp. 288–89.

<sup>39</sup> Haring, in van Gompel and Hoogendijk (eds.), *Materiality of Texts*, 2018, pp. 48–50.

already have begun after the reign of Rameses IV, that is, well before the middle of the Twentieth Dynasty. Reasons for this decline are difficult to see, but the decrease itself is notable with 621 ostraca datable to Ramesses III (mainly to his later years); 338 to Ramesses IV (a six-year reign), only 115 to the twenty years covered by Ramesses V-VIII, forty-four to the reign of Ramesses IX (which lasted nineteen years), and a maximum of eight to the reigns of his two successors (together lasting over thirty years).<sup>40</sup>

It should be noted at this point that some Ramesside documentary ostraca kept in the Oriental Institute Museum (Chicago) and the French Archaeological Institute (IFAO, Cairo) are reported to have come from Medinet Habu. At first sight this strengthens the idea that necropolis workmen or their administrators were staying there. However, some of these ostraca have been ascribed to the reigns of Merenptah, Ramesses III, IV or V;<sup>41</sup> these dates are thus too early for the ostraca to be associated with the supposed move to the temple. Others do seem to belong to the late Twentieth Dynasty; one of these is actually a stone weight bearing one line of hieratic: “weight of the copper of the scribe Thutmose”.<sup>42</sup> Assuming this is our necropolis scribe, we might see this find as evidence of his stay at Medinet Habu. The truth is, however, that we cannot be certain about the provenance of any of these ostraca, since some of them were not excavated but purchased.<sup>43</sup>

Although ostraca from the late Twentieth Dynasty are represented in much smaller numbers than those of earlier years, their production did not cease altogether. Among the ostraca mentioned previously, there is one from the Valley of the Kings dated to year 20 of Ramesses XI or later, and some Turin ostraca from Deir el-Medina may be from the same reign but may also be older.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, there is a separate group of approximately a hundred ostraca that may date to the very final years of the Twentieth Dynasty, and/or to the beginning

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<sup>40</sup> Haring, in van Gompel and Hoogendijk (eds.), *Materiality of Texts*, 2018, p. 49. Note that this is an indication on the basis of datable ostraca only, there being numerous ostraca (published and unpublished) that cannot be dated more precisely than “Ramesside” or even “New Kingdom”.

<sup>41</sup> O. DeM 870 and O. OIM 13512.

<sup>42</sup> O. OIM MH 1866 and W. DeM 5155; the latter is the Thutmose weight.

<sup>43</sup> See Wilfong, in Teeter and Larson (eds.), *Gold of Praise*, 1999, p. 419, on O. OIM 13512: “... acquired by purchase in Egypt along with a large group of ostraca in various scripts during the excavation of Medinet Habu by the Oriental Institute”. This makes “Medinet Habu” a doubtful provenance if no more precise information is available.

<sup>44</sup> O. Cairo CG 25232, O. Turin CG 57372 and 57387; see Haring, in van Gompel and Hoogendijk (eds.), *Materiality of Texts*, 2018, p. 49, for details.

of the Twenty-first. They come from different findspots in the Theban mountains, including Deir el-Bahri, the Valley of the Kings, and Deir el-Medina. They are mainly lists of names, many of which are known from the Late Ramesside Letters but not from the earlier necropolis workforce. Together they possibly represent three generations, the earliest of which is associated with years seven to fourteen of the *whm-msw.t*(?) and the scribe Butehamun, under whose supervision they may have been involved in the emptying of tombs and the reburial of mummies.<sup>45</sup> Probably belonging to this corpus is one ostrakon found at Deir el-Medina that bears a list of names that are difficult to connect with the necropolis workforce of earlier years, together with anonymous priests, maidservants and water-carriers (O. DeM 256; **Fig. 1**). Kathrin Gabler rightly questions if the latter were still part of a *smd.t* serving a locally resident tomb workforce,<sup>46</sup> but the fact remains that the ostrakon was excavated at Deir el-Medina, therefore probably discarded there, and it mentions at least sixteen persons by name, and some more anonymous ones, as the recipients of loaves.

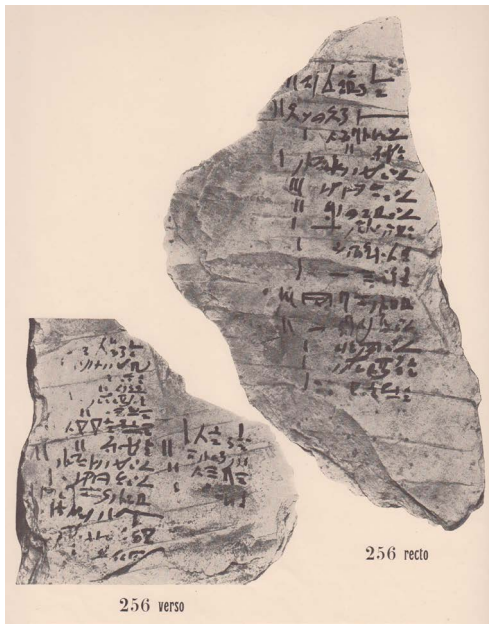
There is another category of ostraca from Deir el-Medina supporting the idea that a group of workmen was still based there shortly before and after the beginning of the *whm-msw.t*. A group of fifteen limestone ostraca from the site, and apparently dating to these very years, uses a notation that is reminiscent of earlier Twentieth Dynasty examples.<sup>47</sup> This notation system combines workmen's identity marks with signs depicting commodities delivered, such as firewood and fish, and with numbers and calendar dates in hieratic, these components together forming a sort of pseudo-writing that mimics the style and content of hieratic documentary texts.<sup>48</sup> The group includes several that have been marked by

<sup>45</sup> Most of these remain unpublished; see Demarée, in Andreu (eds.), *Deir el-Médineh et la Vallée des Rois*, 2003, pp. 235–51.

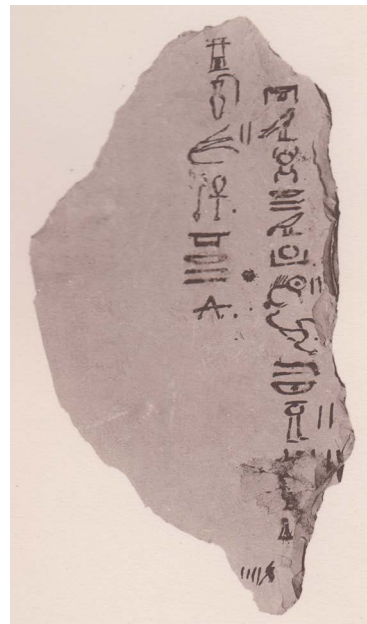
<sup>46</sup> Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, p. 545, note 2092.

<sup>47</sup> O. IFAO ONL 1409, 6178–6185, 6239, 6242, 6282, 6685, 6711 and 6832, all unpublished. I wish to thank the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo, for allowing access to this material during stays in 2013 and 2014. An edition of all IFAO ostraca bearing workmen's marks is being prepared by the author together with Kyra van der Moezel and Daniel Soliman (see also next footnote).

<sup>48</sup> For this type of record see in general Haring, *Single Sign*, 2018, and for a brief overview, Haring, in Rosati and Guidotti (eds.), *Proceedings of the XI International Congress of Egyptologists*, 2017, pp. 266–70. See also the contribution by Daniel Soliman to this volume. The necropolis workmen's marking system and its use on ostraca has been the topic of a research project at Leiden University under the supervision of the author, and supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) from 2011 to 2015. Apart from the publications mentioned here and several articles, the project's deliverables include two PhD theses, as yet unpublished: Van der Moezel, "Of Marks and Meaning", 2016; Soliman, "Of Marks and Men", 2016.



**Fig. 1** O. DeM 256 (23 x 13 cm).  
(From Černý, *Ostraca hiératiques*, IV, 1939, pl. 5A).



**Fig. 2** O. Cairo CG 25317 (41 x 21 cm).  
(From Daressy, *Ostraca*, 1901, pl. LIX). The damaged mark 𐀀 of Qaydjoret can be seen beneath 𐀀 (right column).

the excavators as coming from the Grand Puits at Deir el-Medina,<sup>49</sup> and it is likely that they are all from that locality because their distinctive style makes them a coherent group which was probably produced by one person. The producer's writing abilities must have been very limited, and in this sense, the ostraca are comparable to earlier Twentieth Dynasty records of the same type, which were probably also made by one or more semi-literate administrators.<sup>50</sup> As opposed to those earlier ostraca, however, they lack hieratic counterparts bearing the same or similar sorts of data. As a result of this lack, and of their idiosyncratic style, they are exceedingly difficult to decipher.

Some of the ostraca mention regnal years 16, 18 and 20. Careful research of the entire group by Daniel Soliman has made it likely that these years belong to the reign of Ramesses XI.<sup>51</sup> This means that the ostraca were made in the years preceding and following year one of the *whm-msw.t* (which corresponds with regnal year 19 of Ramesses XI). The main reasons for assigning the ostraca to this pe-

<sup>49</sup> O. IFAO ONL 6185, 6282, 6685, 6711 and 6832, all marked "GP", and bearing excavation dates in February-April 1949.

<sup>50</sup> Haring, *Single Sign*, 2018, p. 194.

<sup>51</sup> Soliman, "Of Marks and Men", 2016, pp. 331-41.

riod are the high regnal years (which limit the possible Twentieth Dynasty reigns to Ramesses III and XI) and the identity marks incorporated in their entries. These include several abstract, pictorial and pseudo-hieroglyphic signs that are known from earlier parts of the Ramesside Period (𐀀 𐀁 𐀂 𐀃 𐀄), some even already from the Eighteenth Dynasty (𐀅 𐀆 𐀇 𐀈). However they also include anthropomorphic marks that are characteristic of the mid- to late Twentieth Dynasty. The best known of these is 𐀉, a mark no doubt inspired by the hieroglyphic or hieratic sign for *qꜣy* “high”, which was used by the workman and doorkeeper (later guard) Qaydjoret (i). We find this mark on ostraca from the reigns of Ramesses IX-XI, for instance at the bottom of a column of marks (as is to be expected for a low-status doorkeeper), or higher up (perhaps indicating his elevation to guard; see Fig. 2).<sup>52</sup> Qaydjoret himself is known from hieratic texts to have been a doorkeeper from the mid-Twentieth Dynasty onward; his last known appearance is as a guard in or around year 6 of the *whm-msw.t*.<sup>53</sup> Other anthropomorphic marks are: 𐀊, presumably belonging to the workman Akhpet (iii), whose name in hieroglyphic and hieratic is written with a similar sign, a man “lifting” the sky (*ḥ p.t*), and who is known from mid-Twentieth Dynasty texts;<sup>54</sup> 𐀋, a Ptah figure possibly for Ptahkhau (i) who was probably active in the mid- to late Twentieth Dynasty.<sup>55</sup>

Together, the marks connect this group of ostraca of years 16-20 with the workmen’s community as known from the mid- to late Twentieth Dynasty. They do not seem to be related to persons mentioned in the late group of ostraca of the late Twentieth or early Twenty-first Dynasty such as O. DeM 256,<sup>56</sup> but together with the latter ostrakon, they suggest that administration, and indeed life, continued at Deir el-Medina late in the reign of Ramesses XI. Although they use the same type of entries as earlier Twentieth Dynasty ostraca (composed of calendar dates, marks, pictograms for commodities, hieratic numbers, perhaps

<sup>52</sup> Haring, *Single Sign*, 2018, p. 202. For doorkeepers, their duties and status, see Goecke-Bauer, in Janssen *et al.* (eds.), *Woodcutters, Potters and Doorkeepers*, 2003, pp. 138–46; for Qaydjoret, see Davies, *Who’s Who*, 1999, pp. 200–02.

<sup>53</sup> Qaydjoret is one of the addressees in a letter by the scribe Thutmose (P. Leiden I 369 = Late Ramesside Letter no. 1, dated to year 6 of the *whm-msw.t* or later by Wentz, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 1967, pp. 6–7, 16). He was assisting Thutmose in a search for some lost property of the latter in the same year 6 according to P. Vienna ÄS 10321 verso 5: Demarée, *The Notebook of Dhutmose*, 2018, pp. 21–22.

<sup>54</sup> Davies, *Who’s Who*, 1999, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Being a son of the draughtsman Nebnefer (ix), who is known from the reigns of Ramesses III–V and was possibly still active under Ramesses VII: Davies, *Who’s Who*, 1999, p. 169.

<sup>56</sup> See footnotes 44–45 above.

signs for other administrative notions), their style is different, with horizontal but slightly undulating lines of text, on some ostraca being separated by drawn lines. Especially striking are the numerous hieratic signs for “hundred” following the commodities. The numbers rise as high as 900, but it is not always clear which commodities are being referred to. They do seem to include firewood and fish, supplies of which at Deir el-Medina are well-known from earlier Ramesside records. Even some of the quantities delivered are quite comparable with those recorded in the earlier Twentieth Dynasty.<sup>57</sup> These quantities suggest that they served the upkeep of a sizeable community, and not merely a handful of people left behind in a crumbling village.<sup>58</sup>

### 3. THE EVIDENCE RECONSIDERED

What happened to the community of necropolis workmen and their settlement at Deir el-Medina at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty? Although it is still very difficult to be precise about local developments during the reign of Ramesses XI, the combination of old and newly acquired data gives us enough reason to throw doubt on the often-repeated assertion that the entire workforce left the settlement for Medinet Habu at some point in that reign. Let us readdress the points raised in support of that assertion one by one.

(1) The decline in the production of ostraca seems to have been indeed notable, but actually had begun already before the middle of the Twentieth Dynasty. Recent investigations have shown, moreover, that ostraca bearing a semi-literate notation incorporating workmen’s marks were still being produced at Deir el-Medina around the beginning of the *whm-msw.t*, and that hieratic documentary ostraca belonging to a very late group (possibly including the early years of the Twenty-first Dynasty) have been found at the same site.

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<sup>57</sup> Firewood and fish appear to be mentioned in O. IFAO ONL 6239 and 6685; in each of these texts one line has the number “700” after the symbol for firewood and one or two marks. Firewood quota of 700 and 750 units for ten days frequently appear in texts from the reigns of Ramesses III and IV (e.g. O. DeM 36, 43, 46, 47, 151, 154, 161 + Strasbourg H 82, O. DeM 172).

<sup>58</sup> The mention of rain in Harshire’s hut in Late Ramesside Letter no. 9 made Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, 1985, p. 225, think of Deir el-Medina as a ruinous village, but cf. note 9 above.



(2) A substantial increase in the production of documentary papyri at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty cannot be proved as far as the administration of the necropolis workforce itself is concerned. Many papyri have been reused, and if all earlier texts on these papyri could be revealed again, they might include many of earlier Twentieth Dynasty date. The Tomb Robbery Papyri and the Late Ramesside Letters are not documents of regular necropolis administration, but corpora connected with specific developments at the end of the dynasty.

(3) There is no conclusive evidence for Medinet Habu being the findspot of Ramesside documentary papyri or ostraca.

(4) The reduction of the royal necropolis workforce, as suggested by lists of workmen on papyri from the final reigns of the Twentieth Dynasty, is best explained by the fact that tomb construction in the Valley of the Kings came to an end: the tombs of Ramesses X and XI remained unfinished, and perhaps were never used for the burial of these kings.

(5) The storage of grain for the rations of the necropolis workmen in temple storerooms, presumably at Medinet Habu, and the distribution of food to the men at that location, is no proof that they were living there. As is shown by several papyri from the reign of Ramesses XI, the necropolis scribe had become responsible for the collection of the grain, something that had not occurred under previous kings,<sup>59</sup> and this exceptional development may also have been the reason for using temple storerooms, if that also was a new practice. In fact, we do not know where the grain for the workmen's rations was stored before it arrived at their village before the reign of Ramesses XI.<sup>60</sup>

(6) The absence of watercarriers, the duty roster and the *h<sub>tm</sub>* from the extant documentary texts of the royal necropolis workforce in the reign of Ramesses XI does not mean, strictly speaking, that they vanished entirely. In fact, water-

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<sup>59</sup> See note 7 above, and Demarée, in Dorn and Polis (eds.), *Outside the Box*, 2018, pp. 131–40; idem, *The Notebook of Dhutmose*, 2018, p. 12. See also the contribution by Rob Demarée to this volume.

<sup>60</sup> Incidental food deliveries from, or distributions at memorial and other temples (such as the Karnak temple of Ma'at) to necropolis workmen were in fact recorded throughout the Ramesside Period; see Haring, *Divine Households*, 1997, pp. 256–63. Temples were, however, reluctant with respect to requests for grain by the workmen when their regular rations did not come; Haring, *Divine Households*, 1997, pp. 268–73.



carriers are still mentioned in O. DeM 256 and in the Tomb Robbery Papyri (but not in the Late Ramesside Letters).<sup>61</sup> Their absence may point to a change in the organization of the necropolis workforce, but it remains obscure precisely what change that might have been.

(7) The fact that members of the *smd.t* personnel of the royal necropolis are mentioned in the lists on Tomb Robbery Papyri BM EA 10054 and 10068 as living at or near Medinet Habu does not say anything about the living quarters of the necropolis *workmen* at the time. As far as we can tell, *smd.t* personnel were never based in the Deir el-Medina settlement, and so probably they had been living elsewhere on the West Bank earlier, some possibly near Medinet Habu.

(8) The only necropolis functionary whose dwelling place is explicitly said to have been within the walls of Medinet Habu, and this in a letter written by himself, is the senior scribe Thutmose. But the letter does not say if his dwelling there was a long-term situation. As we have seen, Thutmose is represented archaeologically both in Medinet Habu and in Deir el-Medina. From the former site come two reused doorjambs bearing his name; at the latter were found a stela and a fragment of a canopic jar of his. In addition, Deir el-Medina is very probably the provenance of many, if not all, of the papyrus documents produced by this scribe. As a descendant of the famous senior scribe Amennakht, he may even have been one of the producers and keepers of a family archive of papyri, substantial portions of which are currently part of the papyrus collections of the Museo Egizio, the IFAO, and other institutional collections.<sup>62</sup>

We still do not know what precisely *did* happen to the community of royal necropolis workmen in the last years of the Twentieth Dynasty, but the evidence available does not suggest that their settlement at Deir el-Medina was at any point suddenly and deliberately abandoned for good. If such a thing happened

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<sup>61</sup> A watercarrier Pakharu is mentioned in P. Turin Cat. 2003, which is dated by some to year 3 of Ramesses XI (Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, 1985, p. 124, note 6; Gabler, *Who's Who*, 2018, pp. 114–15, 544), but may alternatively be from year 3 of the *whm-msw.t* (Davies, *Who's Who*, 1999, p. 137; Demarée, *The Notebook of Dhutmose*, 2018, p. 10).

<sup>62</sup> See Soliman, in Bausi *et al.* (eds.), *Manuscripts and Archives*, 2018, pp. 151–52, on the deposition of papyri in the tomb of Amennakht according to Late Ramesside Letter no. 9; cf. note 9 above, and Haring, in van Gompel and Hoogendijk (eds.), *Materiality of Texts*, 2018, p. 44.

at all, it must rather have been at some point in the early Twenty-first Dynasty. Alternatively, the desertion of the settlement may have been a gradual process.<sup>63</sup> Also, there is no clear textual reference to, nor any archaeological evidence supporting, a move of the entire necropolis workforce to the Medinet Habu temple precinct. I therefore suggest that we stop telling the world and each other that that is what happened.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Valbelle, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, 1985, p. 225, and Peden, in Demarée and Egberts (eds.), *Deir el-Medina in the Third Millennium*, 2000, p. 288, note 12, saying that places at Deir el-Medina were inspected and used for storage until at least the early Twenty-first Dynasty. The basis for this assertion are – again – Late Ramesside Letter no. 9 together with graffiti left by Butehamun in TT290 and by his son Ankhefenamun in the adjoining TT291; see Bruyère and Kuentz, *Tombes thébaines*, 1926, pp. 56–58, 71, 75–76; Jansen-Winkel, *Inschriften der Spätzeit I*, 2007, p. 41. See note 34 above for TT291 as the possible place of burial of Butehamun.

<sup>64</sup> An important article on the papyri from Deir el-Medina appeared after this paper had been submitted: Demarée, Dorn and Polis, “Les listes de maisonnées de Deir el-Médina”, 2020.

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