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# Material Matters: Documentary Papyri and Ostraca in Late Ramesside Thebes

Ben Haring

The topic of this paper is a long-standing question with respect to the numbers of hieratic documentary papyri and ostraca that have survived from the late Ramesside Period (the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty, ca. 1186–1070 BC) in the Theban necropolis.\* The question, briefly put, is why so many papyri have survived from the later part of that dynasty, whereas the number of surviving ostraca is so much smaller in that period than before. Neither the increasing number of papyri, nor the decrease in the number of ostraca, appear to be the mere result of the chance survival of these documents. But if their changing numbers have historical backgrounds at all, it remains difficult to establish what backgrounds precisely these may have been.

The papyri and ostraca discussed were produced mainly by the community of royal necropolis workmen, settled at what is now the archaeological site of Deir el-Medina, a location close to the royal tombs constructed by these workmen in the Valley of the Kings (Biban el-Moluk) and the Valley of the Queens (Biban el-Harim).<sup>1</sup> The permanent presence of royal necropolis administrators and the exceptional spread of literacy in the community resulted in a wealth of written information produced and discarded in and near the settlement and at the work sites.<sup>2</sup> This, in combination with the isolated location of the settlement in dry desert conditions, and its abandonment after the

Ramesside Period, caused many thousands of ostraca, hundreds of papyri, and hundreds of monumental hieroglyphic inscriptions to survive. These records make the necropolis workmen's settlement at Deir el-Medina the best textually documented village community of pre-Hellenistic Egypt. The material remains of the settlement, including its cult chapels and tombs, also make it the best archaeologically documented village of Antiquity.

## 1 Ostraca and Papyri: Spatial and Chronological Distribution<sup>3</sup>

Over ten thousand documentary ostraca, of pottery and limestone, are currently known to have survived from the Ramesside community of royal necropolis workmen. These ostraca have mainly been found in or near the workmen's settlement at Deir el-Medina, as well as in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens.<sup>4</sup> In addition, several hundred documentary papyri produced by the community and its administration have survived.<sup>5</sup> Documentary papyri and ostraca are complemented by other genres, mainly literary, religious and pictorial. Ramesside literary ostraca, for instance, have survived in numbers comparable to the documentary ones, and being expert draftsmen and painters, the Deir el-Medina workmen produced thousands of drawings and paintings on ostraca. Both written and

\* I wish to thank Rob Demarée for reading a draft version of this paper and for improvements suggested by him. Helen Richardson-Hewitt has kindly corrected my English.

- 1 J. ČERNÝ, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*, 2nd ed. (BdÉ 50, Cairo, 2001) and D. VALBELLE, *Les ouvriers de la Tombe: Deir el-Médineh à l'époque ramesside* (BdÉ 96, Cairo, 1985) remain the basis for further study. For an update on various aspects of the community and its archaeological and textual legacy, see G. ANDREU (ed.), *Les artistes de Pharaon. Deir el-Médineh et la Vallée des Rois* (Paris – Turnhout, 2002).
- 2 For literacy at Deir el-Medina, see J.J. JANSSEN, 'Literacy and Letters at Deir el-Medina', in: R.J. DEMARÉE – A. 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), pp. 81–94; B. HARING, 'From Oral Practice to Written Record in Ramesside Deir el-Medina', *JESHO* 46 (2003), pp. 249–272; J. BAINES – C. EYRE, 'Four Notes on Literacy', in: J. BAINES, *Visual and Written Culture in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 63–94 and 172–174, esp. pp. 89–94.

- 3 Quantitative data on documentary papyri and ostraca are from the Deir el-Medina Database, the draft version of which currently includes data from more than 5,000 documents; its online, free access publication (<http://dmd.wepwawet.nl>) has data from over 4,000.
- 4 Not even half of this material has been published in one way or another (editions range from full, including photos and/or facsimiles, to bare transcriptions). The published texts (ostraca and papyri) are included in the Deir el-Medina Database together with almost one thousand unpublished ostraca. The remaining unpublished material (most of which is kept in the French Archaeological Institute in Cairo, IFAO) includes many badly preserved or otherwise obscure and undatable texts.
- 5 Approximately 4.5% of the documents in the Deir el-Medina Database are papyri; the precise number is 239. This number includes the Late Ramesside Letters, but not the Tomb Robbery Papyri, for which see below, fn. 22–25.

pictorial material include casual work (preliminary notes and sketches) as well as the final products kept by members of the community (e.g. substantial portions of literary text, magical compendiums, miniature stelae). When new finds of ostraca are made, they are mostly heterogeneous collections of written and pictorial records.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore clear that all this material belonged together in antiquity, an observation that tends to be obscured by genre classification in modern scholarly discussions. The following sections will nonetheless focus on hieratic documentary texts.

The provenance of papyri is overall less well known than that of ostraca. Whereas most ostraca (though certainly not all) have an archaeologically recorded provenance, such records are absent for papyri, except for a few cases. The majority of ostraca have come to light during archaeological excavations – notably those by the French Archaeological Institute (IFAO) at Deir el-Medina, and by past and present missions in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens. The majority of papyri from the royal necropolis administration are now in the Museo Egizio, Turin; the Ramesside documentary papyri among them do not have a recorded provenance. The few indications we have for associated papyri in other collections point to the site of Deir el-Medina<sup>7</sup> and to one or more New Kingdom tombs in the Theban necropolis.<sup>8</sup> In his reports, IFAO excavator Bernard

Bruyère frequently notes the finding of papyrus fragments, some of which are thought to belong to the collection of papyri kept in the Museo Egizio, Turin.<sup>9</sup> Papyri, more than ostraca, attracted the attention of collectors well before the days of modern systematic excavations, and usually lack documentation of their archaeological context. The texts themselves, however, often provide indications about the people and institutions that produced them; most of them can therefore safely be assigned to the community of royal necropolis workmen.

The chronological distribution of ostraca and papyri over the Ramesside Period is uneven. The numbers of datable documentary ostraca seem to have increased in the course of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Dynasties. I have argued that this increase was mainly due to the growing need felt by the village inhabitants to write down, or

6 A very clear example is the group of material (including over 800 ostraca of different sorts) presented integrally in A. DORN, *Arbeiterhütten im Tal der Könige. Ein Beitrag zur altägyptischen Sozialgeschichte aufgrund von neuem Quellenmaterial aus der Mitte der 20. Dynastie (ca. 1150 v. Chr.)* (AegHelv 23, Basel, 2011).

7 A substantial papyrus archive with known provenance from the necropolis immediately to the west of the workmen's settlement includes the Chester Beatty and related Deir el-Medina papyri (at least papyri Deir el-Medina 1–17, 23 and 25, now in the IFAO); see P.W. PESTMAN, 'Who Were the Owners, in the 'Community of Workmen', of the Chester Beatty Papyri', in: R.J. DEMARÉE – J.J. JANSSEN (eds), *Gleanings from Deir el-Medina* (EgUit 1, Leiden, 1982), pp. 155–172. P. DeM 28, 30 and 31 were also found during IFAO excavations at Deir el-Medina (J. ČERNÝ, *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir el-Médineh*, II. Catalogue par YVAN KOENIG [DFIFAO 22, Cairo, 1986], pp. 5–6). P. Berlin P 23301 was perhaps excavated by Georg Möller at Deir el-Medina (H.-W. FISCHER-ELFERT, 'A Strike in the Reign of Merenptah?', in: V. LEPPER [ed.], *Forschung in der Papyrussammlung. Eine Festgabe für das Neue Museum [Ägyptische und Orientalische Papyri und Handschriften des Ägyptischen Museums und Papyrussammlung Berlin 1, Berlin, 2012]*, pp. 47–48).

8 P. Ashmolean Museum 1958.111 is thought to come from Theban Tomb 48 (as indicated in Černý Notebook 46.18 – note Černý's own doubts expressed on an attachment to this page, but see also A.H. GARDINER, 'A Lawsuit Arising from the Purchase of Two

Slaves', *JEA* 21 [1935], p. 140); P. Ashmolean Museum 1920.1283 from Theban Tomb 331 (C.J. EYRE, 'An Accounts Papyrus from Thebes', *JEA* 66 [1980], p. 108 – but see note 2 there); P. Ashmolean Museum 1945.93 and P. Berlin P 10494 are said to be 'from a tomb in Upper Thebes' (J. ČERNÝ, *Late Ramesside Letters* [BiAeg 9, Brussels, 1939], p. xv); P. Bournemouth 17/1931 has allegedly been 'found in the coffin of an Egyptian Mummy, at Thebes in Upper Egypt' (ČERNÝ, *op. cit.*, p. xvi); P. Bulaq 10 among debris in the Assasif region (A. MARIETTE, *Les papyrus égyptiens du Musée de Boulaq*, II [Paris, 1872], p. [5]); P. Rifaud D 'sur la poitrine en carton d'une momie découverte à Gournah' (Y. KOENIG, 'Nouveaux textes Rifaud I', *CRIPPEL* 10 [1988], p. 57). None of these indications must be taken at face value, but together they are suggestive of one or more tombs being the provenance of some of the papyri.

9 For instance, fragments found by Bruyère in Deir el-Medina tombs 1336, 1337 and 1340 were recognised by Jaroslav Černý and Guiseppe Botti as belonging to P. Turin Cat. 1885 (bearing i.a. a plan of the tomb of Ramesses IV): B. BRUYÈRE, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh (1933–1934)* (FIFAO 14, Cairo, 1937), pp. 79–80. It is not certain, however, that the adjoining tomb 1338 was that of the necropolis scribe Amennakhte, and the findspot of the bulk of Turin papyri, as is confidently stated by J.A. HARRELL – V.M. BROWN, 'The Oldest Surviving Topographical Map from Ancient Egypt (Turin Papyri 1879, 1899, and 1969)', *JARCE* 29 (1992), p. 100; cf. BRUYÈRE, *Rapport (1933–1934)*, pp. 75–87, who considered tombs 1338 and 1343 both as possible places of burial of Amennakhte. In his notes of 18 January 1933, Bruyère wrote that tomb 1340 was 'almost certainly' the burial spot (see IFAO website Archives de Bernard Bruyère, <http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?date=1933-01-18&os=1>). Recently, some IFAO papyrus fragments have been recognised by Stéphane Polis and Andreas Dorn as belonging to the Turin fragments known as the *Stato Civile* (Stéphane Polis, personal communication by email, 22th February, 2017). An article on this discovery by Stéphane Polis, Robert Demarée and Andreas Dorn is due to appear in the *BIFAO*. For the *Stato Civile*, dating from the period Ramesses IV–IX, see R. DEMARÉE – D. VALBELLE, *Les registres de recensement du village de Deir el-Médineh (Le 'Stato Civile')* (Leuven etc., 2011).

to have written down, their personal matters in letters, accounts and legal texts.<sup>10</sup> These practices were facilitated, if not stimulated by the permanent presence of local scribes in the community.<sup>11</sup> The necropolis scribe Amennakht and his descendants in particular appear to have been responsible for a substantial part of the textual output, documentary and otherwise, of the Twentieth Dynasty. If these observations are correct, it is surprising to see that the number of known documentary hieratic ostraca datable to the second half of that dynasty (Ramesses IX–XI: 51 or 52 ostraca) is so much smaller than that of ostraca belonging to reigns in its first half (Ramesses III–VIII: 1,074).<sup>12</sup> This small number does not include an historically separate group of approximately a hundred ostraca belonging (perhaps) to the very last years of the Twentieth Dynasty or (more likely) to the beginning of the Twenty-first. They are mainly lists of names and supplies, and are probably connected with the reburial of the royal mummies and related activities under the priest-kings Herihor, Pinodjem and their successors.<sup>13</sup>

Most ostraca found during excavations of Deir el-Medina come from ancient dumps surrounding the workmen's settlement. They were not all casual documents, however, or drafts for texts on papyrus. There was a systematic production of documentary ostraca, with standardised genres and terminology, and ostraca could be filed for months or even years before they were discarded.<sup>14</sup> Some limestone and pottery fragments were appreciated enough to re-use them as textual supports: approximately five per cent of the ostraca are palimpsest (with papyri this is much more, see below). It has even been suggested

recently, on the basis of lithic analysis, that some limestone chips were produced specifically to serve as ostraca.<sup>15</sup>

With papyri, the chronological pattern is somewhat different. Documentary papyri attributed to the Nineteenth Dynasty are relatively few (20), and most of the datable documents are from the last reigns of that dynasty.<sup>16</sup> Many more are dated to the Twentieth Dynasty (195), and most of these (129) to the end of that dynasty. These numbers include papyri dated not more precisely than 'Twentieth Dynasty' or 'late Twentieth Dynasty'. Of those dated more precisely, 42 belong to the reigns of Ramesses III to VIII (61 years),<sup>17</sup> and 109 to the period Ramesses IX–XI (53 years). Of these 109, 59 have been dated more precisely by Egyptologists to the last part of the reign of Ramesses XI, the so-called 'Renaissance', starting in the king's 19th regnal year. It would seem from these numbers that the production of documentary papyri increased from the late Nineteenth Dynasty onward, and grew explosively – unlike the production of ostraca – in the last decades of the Twentieth. *A priori*, however, there are some reasons to be very careful with these numbers.

First of all, papyrus is a fragile material. We are extremely fortunate that so much of it has survived from Egyptian antiquity, as opposed to the rest of the Middle East and the Mediterranean, but what we have is really but a tiny bit of what was once produced. Even the chronological distribution of papyri from Deir el-Medina, an exceptionally rich collection in themselves, requires *caveats*. Among the small number of papyri from the late Nineteenth Dynasty is a substantial, though fragmentary document, now in the Petrie Museum of University College, London. This document, known to Egyptologists as Papyrus Greg, is a necropolis journal of work done, and supplies received by the royal necropolis workforce.<sup>18</sup> Its daily entries are of a

10 HARING, 'From Oral Practice', pp. 253 and 255.

11 B.J.J. HARING, 'Scribes and Scribal Activity at Deir el-Medina', in: A. DORN – T. HOFMANN (eds), *Living and Writing in Deir el-Medine. Socio-historical Embodiment of Deir el-Medine Texts* (AegHelv 19, Basel, 2006), pp. 107–112. For scribes and literacy at Deir el-Medina see also BAINES – EYRE, 'Four Notes on Literacy', pp. 63–94, esp. 89–94.

12 Numbers here and in the following based on the 'Dates attributed' field in records of the Deir el-Medina Database. For a breakdown by individual reigns, see table 2 below.

13 For which see R.J. DEMARÉE, 'Quelques textes de la fin de la XX<sup>e</sup> et du début de la XXI<sup>e</sup> dynastie', in: G. ANDREU (ed.), *Deir el-Médineh et la Vallée des Rois. La vie en Égypte au temps des pharaons du Nouvel Empire. Actes du colloque organisé par le musée du Louvre les 3 et 4 mai 2002* (Paris, 2003), pp. 235–251.

14 See in general K. DONKER VAN HEEL – B.J.J. HARING, *Writing in a Workmen's Village. Scribal Practice in Ramesside Deir el-Medina* (EgUit 16, Leiden, 2003).

15 J. PELEGRIN – G. ANDREU-LANOË – CHR. PARISELLE, 'La production des ostraca en calcaire dans la nécropole thébaine', *BIFAO* 115 (2015), pp. 325–352, esp. 346 and 352.

16 Of a total of 20, 16 can be dated to individual reigns; 11 of these to the reigns of Merneptah – Siptah.

17 There is, however, very little material from the early reign of Ramesses III, so that the timespan is practically reduced to less than 50 years.

18 Official number: P. UC 34336. As is so often the case with papyri, the alternative name 'Greg' is that of a former owner, Dr. Walter Wilson Greg. The standard edition of the text is a hieroglyphic transcription in K.A. KITCHEN, *Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical*, v (Oxford, 1983), pp. 437–448 (here wrongly dated to the reign of Ramesses III). Translation in IDEM, *Ramesside Inscriptions. Translated and Annotated: Translations*, v



highly systematic and uniform type, which gives the impression that this sort of text was common at the time it was produced. Indeed, entries of exactly the same type are found on several ostraca from the same period, though not on papyri. Had this one papyrus not come to us, we could have thought that in the late Nineteenth Dynasty, with its relative paucity of papyri, this sort of information was kept on ostraca only, whereas in truth there may have been (many) more papyri like P. Greg which are now lost.<sup>19</sup>

As if the sheer loss of papyrus is not bad enough already, many of the papyri that did survive have been re-used. At least forty per cent of the Ramesside documentary papyri from the Theban necropolis are palimpsests and show traces of previous texts that have been washed away to make place for new ones.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, what we have in such cases is merely the last stages in a history of papyrus re-use, which may even have included three or more of such stages. Consequently, the number of relevant documentary texts produced could be doubled, tripled, etc. if we could only be certain of the number of times of re-use, and of the genre of the previous texts (which was not necessarily documentary).

Finally, the relatively large number of papyri from the very end of the Twentieth Dynasty is in part certainly due to special circumstances. The 59 papyri from the 'Renaissance' are mostly letters written by and to a small group of necropolis administrators. Many of the papyri approximately dated 'late Twentieth Dynasty' in Egyptological literature in fact also belong to this group of texts, which Egyptologists refer to as the 'Late Ramesside Letters'.<sup>21</sup> The letters reflect a particular episode in which no royal tombs seem to have been under construction, and in which the necropolis workforce was at the service of the

army general and high priest Paiankh. In addition, a group of twelve papyri has not been included in the previous counts and form a dossier of their own: the 'Tomb Robbery Papyri'.<sup>22</sup> These documents, most of which are quite large, do not represent the output of necropolis administration, but they are the result of investigations by external committees (sometimes including local necropolis administrators) into the violations of Theban tombs and temples. The investigations took place in years 16–17 of Ramesses IX and again some twenty-five years later, at the beginning of the 'Renaissance'.<sup>23</sup> It is not known whether the resulting documents were all filed together; the last lines of one of the texts, P. Abbott, say that a report was deposited in the office of the vizier;<sup>24</sup> perhaps this report is the papyrus itself. Several tomb-robbery documents are listed in a papyrus of year 6 of the Renaissance, P. Ambras.<sup>25</sup> The heading of the list speaks of documents acquired by a 'chief taxing master' from unspecified people, which had been kept in jars. This may imply that already shortly after having been produced and filed, the papyri were lost from the administration, to be retrieved several years later. In the following paragraphs, the Tomb-Robbery papyri will not be taken into consideration; the focus will be on administrative papyri and ostraca produced in the context of royal tomb construction and life in the workmen's village.

(Oxford etc., 2008), pp. 361–367; see also the translation and discussion in J.J. JANSSEN, *Village Varia. Ten Studies on the History and Administration of Deir el-Medina* (EgUit 11, Leiden, 1997), pp. 111–130.

19 The archive consisting of the Chester Beatty and related papyri (see fn. 7) was initially created by the necropolis scribe Qenhirkhopshef in the second half of the Nineteenth Dynasty, and extended by others in the Twentieth. Qenhirkhopshef's collecting activity shows that papyrus was available to scribes at the time.

20 Number based on information ('palimpsest') in the Description field of the Deir el-Medina Database. For many documents, this information is not even available.

21 Editions and translations: J. ČERNÝ, *Late Ramesside Letters* (BiAeg 9, Brussels, 1939); E.F. WENTE, *Late Ramesside Letters* (SAOC 33, Chicago, 1967); J.J. JANSSEN, *Late Ramesside Letters and Communications* (HPBM 6, London, 1991); R.J. DEMARÉE, *The Bankes Late Ramesside Papyri* (BMRP 155, London, 2006).

22 These are not included in the Deir el-Medina Database. Editions and translations: T.E. PEET, *The Mayer Papyrus A and B, Nos. M 1162 and M. 1186 of the Free Public Museums, Liverpool* (London, 1920); IDEM, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty. Being a Critical Study, with Translations and Commentaries, of the Papyri in Which These Are Recorded*, 1–2 (Oxford, 1930); J. CAPART – A.H. GARDINER – B. V.D. WALLE, 'New Light on the Ramesside Tomb-Robberies', *JEA* 22 (1936), pp. 169–193; O. GOELET, 'A New 'Robbery' Papyrus: Rochester MAG 51.346.1', *JEA* 82 (1996), pp. 107–127, pls. IX and X (improved by J.F. QUACK, 'Eine Revision im Tempel von Karnak (Neuanalyse von Papyrus Rochester MAG 51.346.1)', *SAK* 28 (2000), pp. 219–232.

23 Following Egyptological consensus on the chronology of the late Twentieth Dynasty. The challenging of this chronology by Ad Thijs has not found support; see especially A. THIJS, 'Reconsidering the End of the Twentieth Dynasty, part II', *GM* 170 (1999), pp. 83–99, and the reaction by J. VON BECKERATH, 'Bemerkungen zur Chronologie der Grabräuberpapyri', *ZÄS* 127 (2000), pp. 111–116.

24 PEET, *Tomb-Robberies*, p. 42.

25 PEET, *op. cit.*, pp. 177–182; M. SALAH EL-KHOLI, *Papyri und Ostraka aus der Ramessidenzeit* (Monografie del Museo del Papiro 5, Siracusa, 2006), pp. 15–23, pls. II and IIA.

## 2 Historical Background of the Material

The papyri produced from the late years of Ramesses III onwards provide a lot of information on the history of the community – in fact, they are the most important historical sources for late Ramesside Egypt. The long series of daily entries in necropolis journals, most of which are now kept in the Museo Egizio in Turin, do not only give us information on work and the workmen, but also on developments elsewhere in Egypt that affected the Deir el-Medina community, such as a shortage of rations supplied by the government, hostilities in Thebes and elsewhere, the possibly threatening appearance of Libyan groups, and the overall waning of central pharaonic power. Even with this documentation to hand, however, our understanding of local developments in the late Twentieth Dynasty, including the end of royal tomb construction in the Theban necropolis, remains very poor. The tombs of Ramesses X and XI had not been finished as planned, and it is uncertain whether these pharaohs were ever buried there.<sup>26</sup> As for the community of necropolis workmen, Egyptologists assume that the settlement at Deir el-Medina was given up at some point in the reign of Ramesses XI, and that the workmen and their superiors moved to the nearby temple precinct of Medinet Habu, possibly for reasons of safety. The evidence presented in favour of this hypothesis is, however, circumstantial. Documents from the reign of Ramesses XI no longer mention a number of aspects associated with the regular functioning of the tomb workforce and their settlement: water carriers, the duty roster, and the workmen's own administrative center (*hṯm*).<sup>27</sup> The reduction in the number of workmen in the late Twentieth Dynasty would have made it possible to fit within the temple *temenos* at Medinet Habu.<sup>28</sup> This reduction, together with the supposed relocation, has also been adduced to explain the decline of graffiti in the Theban necropolis.<sup>29</sup> In my opinion, the diminished construction activity in the Valley

of the Kings would be sufficient explanation for the reduction both of the workmen's gang and of their graffiti. Stronger indications for Medinet Habu being the workmen's living quarters may be the storage and distribution of necropolis food supplies in the temple in years 12 and 17 of Ramesses XI.<sup>30</sup> From the Renaissance comes an explicit reference to Medinet Habu as the residence of a necropolis administrator, the scribe Thutmose.<sup>31</sup> But neither individually, nor together, do these indications make it necessary to assume a move by the entire workmen's community from Deir el-Medina to Medinet Habu.

## 3 Twentieth Dynasty Papyri and Ostraca: Numbers and Dates

It has been argued, earlier in this paper, that the numbers of documentary ostraca preserved from the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Dynasty indicate a growth in their production, which in its turn indicates the historical growth of local written culture. Such a theory makes the dramatic decrease of ostraca in the second half of the Twentieth Dynasty difficult to understand. Surely, there cannot have been a sudden decline of local literate practice and needs, and we know that ostraca, however few, were still produced in the late reign of Ramesses XI (see below). On the basis of the numbers of preserved documents, one could presume that the scribes of the late Twentieth Dynasty had a preference for papyrus rather than ostraca as writing material or, alternatively, that papyrus was now more easily available to them than ostraca.<sup>32</sup> The latter option is preferred by Christopher Eyre, who sees the hypothetical move of the necropolis workmen to Medinet Habu as the background to the shift from ostraca to papyrus. Being no

26 On these tombs see, most recently, A. DODSON, 'Royal Tombs of the Twentieth Dynasty', in: R.H. WILKINSON – K.R. WEEKS (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Valley of the Kings* (Oxford etc., 2016), pp. 218–229.

27 ČERNÝ, *Community of Workmen*, p. 190; C.J. EYRE, *Employment and Labour Relations in the Theban Necropolis in the Ramesside Period* (PhD thesis, Oxford, 1980), pp. 44–45; IDEM, *The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt* (Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents, Oxford, 2013), pp. 248–249.

28 VALBELLE, *Ouvriers de la Tombe*, pp. 123–125.

29 A.J. PEDEN, 'The Workmen of Deir el-Medina and the Decline of Textual Graffiti at West Thebes in Late Dynasty XX and Early Dynasty XXI', in: R.J. DEMARÉE – A. EGBERTS (eds), *Deir*

*el-Medina in the Third Millennium AD* (EgUit 14, Leiden, 2000), pp. 287–290.

30 P. Turin Cat. 1888 and 2006+1895; A.H. GARDINER, *Ramesside Administrative Documents* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 35–44 and 64–68.

31 P. Berlin P 10494: ČERNÝ, *Late Ramesside Letters*, pp. 23–24; E.F. WENTE, *Late Ramesside Letters*, pp. 44–45. Dated to year 2 of the Renaissance by WENTE, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

32 Textual references to the local availability of papyrus are rare. The price of papyrus in transaction accounts from Deir el-Medina is quite low when compared to other commodities (J.J. JANSSEN, *Commodity Prices from the Ramesside Period. An Economic Study of the Village of Necropolis Workmen at Thebes* [Leiden, 1975], pp. 447–448). An account of year 7 of Ramesses IX mentions 32 rolls due to be delivered (P. Turin Cat. 2092 + 2080 + 1881 recto v 3; K.A. KITCHEN, *Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical*, VI [Oxford, 1983], p. 613, line 12).

longer housed in Deir el-Medina, and working at the royal tomb infrequently or no longer at all, they would not have had their usual supply of limestone chips. The Medinet Habu temple archives, on the other hand, would have provided them with papyrus for their necropolis records. The same archives could, according to Eyre, even be the provenance of the necropolis papyri.<sup>33</sup> To support this idea one may refer to several papyri on which necropolis texts have been added to temple accounts.<sup>34</sup> But these texts are from the reign of Ramesses IX, which seems too early for the hypothetical resettlement at Medinet Habu. Moreover, it has been made clear in the previous section that the few archaeological indications for the provenance of documentary necropolis papyri point to Deir el-Medina, and perhaps to one or more private tombs in the Theban necropolis. In fact, Medinet Habu has never been reported archaeologically as the provenance of New Kingdom papyri.

An alternative explanation why the documentary papyri of the late Twentieth Dynasty were more numerous than earlier ones is the increasing need in the workmen's community for texts as legal evidence. Papyri, as opposed to ostraca, could be authenticated by sealing, and might therefore have been used increasingly in the late Ramesside Period.<sup>35</sup> This explanation is not a very strong one, however, given the fact that legal texts relating to necropolis workmen or their families are absent from the late Twentieth Dynasty papyri extant. Clearly, 'Proper evaluation of the mass of papyri of the Tomb from the late Ramesside Period as an archive does not yet seem possible'.<sup>36</sup> Hopefully, publication and thorough investigation of the Ramesside papyri in the Museo Egizio will change this sad state of affairs in the years to come.<sup>37</sup>

While waiting for further research of known individual papyri and the identification of many fragments so far unpublished, it is possible to say more about the apparent increase of papyrus documents in the late Twentieth

TABLE 5.1 Regnal years attested in Twentieth Dynasty documentary papyri from the royal necropolis administration dating from before year 19 of Ramesses XI (the beginning of the Renaissance). 'Highest year' means: highest year of reign attested (in any document).<sup>a</sup> **Bold** means: year attested in more than one papyrus document. Numbers based on the Deir el-Medina Database

Reign	Highest year	Years attested in papyri
Ramesses III	32	6 8 16 21 24 29 30 32
Ramesses IV	7	1 2 3 6 7
Ramesses V	4	1 2 3 4
Ramesses VI	8	2 3 4 5 6 7
Ramesses VII	8	1 2 6 7 8
Ramesses VIII	1	—
Ramesses IX	19	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 19
Ramesses X	3	1 2 3
Ramesses XI	28	1 3 8 9 10 12 14 15 17 18

a According to J. VON BECKERATH, *Chronologie des ägyptischen Neuen Reiches* (HAB 39, Hildesheim, 1994), p. 201.

Dynasty on the basis of available data. In fact, the perceived 'increase' may be largely misleading for two reasons. The first is the re-use of papyri that has been discussed earlier in this paper. With at least forty per cent of the documentary papyri being palimpsests, there is a strong possibility that much more documentary material was produced in the earlier Twentieth Dynasty, but was subsequently washed off.

The second reason supplies ample support for the first. A table of regnal years mentioned in Twentieth Dynasty papyri suggests a fairly continuous production of documentary texts on papyrus from the late years of Ramesses III until the beginning of the Renaissance (see table 5.1). From year 29 of Ramesses III onwards, almost all regnal years are represented, many of them even more than once, notwithstanding loss and re-use. Looking at the table one would not concur with Eyre's statement (rendering a very general Egyptological impression) that 'rather few administrative papyri are preserved before the reign of Ramesses IX'.<sup>38</sup> Another striking observation is that there are more papyri dated to the reign of Ramesses IX (35 to 38 papyri for a period of 19 years) than to the period from year 1 of Ramesses X until year 18 of Ramesses XI (12 to 15 papyri for 21 years). The numbers in table 1 suggest no

33 EYRE, *Employment and Labour Relations*, pp. 44–45; IDEM, *The Use of Documents*, pp. 248–249.

34 Clear cases are P. Turin Cat. 1900 (W. HELCK, 'Der Anfang des Papyrus Turin 1900 und 'Recycling' im Alten Ägypten', *CdÉ* 59 [1984], pp. 242–247) and P. Turin Cat. 2009 + 1999 (G. BOTTI – T.E. PEET, *Il giornale della necropoli di Tebe* [I papiri ieratici del Museo di Torino, Turin, 1928], pp. 8–13, pl. 1–7).

35 HARING, 'From Oral Practice', p. 264.

36 EYRE, *The Use of Documents*, p. 321.

37 Currently such a publication and research project is being planned by an international consortium including specialists of the Museo Egizio, the Turin Politecnico, and the universities of Basel, Bologna, Copenhagen, Groningen, Leiden, Liège and Munich.

38 EYRE, *The Use of Documents*, p. 248.

TABLE 5.2 Twentieth Dynasty documentary ostraca produced by the royal necropolis administration, and datable to individual reigns. Numbers based on the Deir el-Medina Database

Reign	Ostraca	Specification (for Ramesses x–XI)
Ramesses III	621	
Ramesses IV	338	
Ramesses V–VIII	115 <sup>a</sup>	
Ramesses IX	44	
Ramesses IX–XI	1	Turin CG 57387: account of work
Ramesses x	2	Cairo CG 25244: work journal and firewood delivery New York MMA 09.184.733: donkey loan <sup>b</sup>
Ramesses XI	4 or 5	Cairo CG 25232: list of names Cairo CG 25243: work journal, supplies Cairo CG 25744: model letter by Butehamun to Herihor Cairo CG 25745: model letter to Paiankh Turin CG 57372(?): account of commodities

a 58 ostraca date either to Ramesses IV or to the period Ramesses v–VIII; the numbers obtained by searching the Deir el-Medina Database separately for ‘Ramesses IV’ and ‘Ramesses v’ (the latter also yielding Ramesses VI, VII and VIII) have therefore both been reduced by 29. Were all ostraca dated more precisely to Ramesses IV or to v–VIII (which is often impossible), these proportions might of course be slightly different, but this would hardly affect the overall picture.

b Not yet in the Deir el-Medina Database. I am grateful to Rob Demarée for showing me this unpublished ostrakon mentioning the name of Ramesses x.

significant growth in the number of documentary papyri prior to the Renaissance with its own specific output (mainly Late Ramesside Letters and Tomb-Robbery Papyri).

The ostraca present a more disturbing picture (see table 5.2). Here as in the case of the papyri, we have to keep in mind that much of the preserved material is still unpublished and undated, which means that the table does not give us firm statistics, but merely an indication. On the basis of dated material the overall impression is that of a decline setting in after the reign of Ramesses IV. The 621 Ramesses III ostraca are mainly from the last decade of his reign, and together with the 338 datable

documentary ostraca from the seven-year reign of his successor they illustrate the relative wealth of such records from the early Twentieth Dynasty. What is surprising is that the seven-year reign of Ramesses IV left 338 datable ostraca, and the twenty years covered by Ramesses v–VIII merely 115.<sup>39</sup> This reduction appears to be a long-term feature, with only forty-four datable ostraca for the nineteen years of Ramesses IX, and not more than eight for the reigns of Ramesses x and XI, a period of potentially more than thirty years.

But the production of ostraca did not cease altogether. Some of the pieces dated to Ramesses XI are from the late years of his reign. Ostrakon Cairo CG 25232 mentions the ‘Scribe of the Tomb’ Penparei who was active after year 20, that is, in or after the Renaissance.<sup>40</sup> The Renaissance being the *floruit* of army general Paiankh, the model letter addressed to him (Cairo CG 25745) must be from that period, and a similar letter to his successor, the general and high priest Herihor (CG 25744), from even later years.<sup>41</sup> These, together with the other Cairo ostraca and the one kept in New York, have all been found in the Valley of the Kings. The Turin ostraca come from Deir el-Medina, but unfortunately, they cannot be dated precisely. Ostrakon Turin CG 57387 mentions the scribe Khaemhedjet, who began his career in the reign of Ramesses IX and is still attested in the first year of Ramesses XI.<sup>42</sup> CG 57372 may well be from the reign of Ramesses XI but a (much) earlier date cannot be excluded.<sup>43</sup> This means that there are no documentary hieratic texts dating to the late reign of Ramesses XI and reported to have been found at the site of the workmen’s settlement.

39 Even adding all 58 ostraca mentioned in table 5.2, note a, to the 115 of Ramesses v–VIII would not give us more than 173 ostraca for 20 years.

40 According to B.G. DAVIES, *Who’s Who at Deir el-Medina. A Prosopographic Study of the Royal Workmen’s Community* (EgUit 13, Leiden, 1999), p. 104.

41 For these two letters see A. EGBERTS, ‘Piankh, Herihor, Dhutmose and Butehamun: A Fresh Look at O. Cairo CG 25744 and 25745’, *GM* 160 (1997), pp. 23–25. For the historical background and related controversies in Egyptological literature see B. HARING, ‘Stela Leiden v 65 and Herihor’s *Damnatio Memoriae*’, *SAK* 41 (2012), pp. 139–152.

42 DAVIES, *Who’s Who*, pp. 117–118.

43 Turin CG 57372 mentions a person called Ankhartore as a supplier of loaves, meat and fish. He may therefore be the fisherman Ankhartore, who cannot be dated more precisely than ‘Twentieth Dynasty’ unless he was the same person as the policeman of the same name (attested in year 12 of Ramesses XI: ČERNÝ, *Community of Workmen*, p. 271) or with a homonymous doorkeeper (reign of Ramesses III: *ibid.*, pp. 163 and 167).



Ostraca of a different type, which have recently come to the attention of Egyptology, seem to fill this lacuna. In addition to the thousands of hieratic ostraca, there are limestone flakes and pottery sherds inscribed with marks referring to individual necropolis workmen and their superiors. This particular system has been the subject of a research project at Leiden University in recent years, as a result of which the development of the Deir el-Medina marking system can be understood quite well, and many of the ostraca bearing marks have been deciphered and dated.<sup>44</sup> There are over a thousand such ostraca, the datable pieces covering a chronological range starting ca. 1450 BCE (reign of Thutmose III) and ending ca. 1086 (year 20 of Ramesses XI). The end of this timespan can be established from a group of unpublished ostraca kept at the IFAO, hence found at Deir el-Medina, and mentioning regnal years 16 to 20.<sup>45</sup> These documents indicate that ostraca were still being produced and discarded at Deir el-Medina late in the reign of Ramesses XI (even in the Renaissance). Hence, they are detrimental to the theory of Medinet Habu as the workmen's living quarters at that time.

In fact, ostraca inscribed with workmen's marks had continued to be made in substantial numbers when the production of hieratic documentary ostraca declined after the early reign of Ramesses IV.<sup>46</sup> In the preceding years, the combination of identity marks, additional icons for certain types of deliveries, and hieratic numbers and calendar dates had resulted in a pseudo-script on ostraca, a mixed code that recorded the same sort of information as

that given by fully hieratic texts. This type of record was apparently produced by semi-literate administrators whose limited familiarity with writing is detectable in the style of their signs. Such ostraca were still produced and discarded at Deir el-Medina in the late reign of Ramesses XI, a period that has left us so few datable hieratic ostraca.

#### 4 Conclusion

Reasoning on the basis of material that has survived from remote antiquity is tricky. Reasoning from material that is no longer there is extremely dangerous. Papyrus, even more than ostraca, is subject to partial or total destruction under physical conditions even the smallest degree less than optimal. Conditions are *relatively* favourable in the desert environment of the Theban necropolis, which is why *relatively* many papyri and ostraca have survived there. One is tempted, then, to see meaningful patterns in the relative numbers of surviving documents of certain types and material. Such expectations may be justified to some extent with respect to ostraca, the survival of which does not seem to be in random clusters, but in increasing numbers until the reign of Ramesses IV, with a marked decline thereafter. This pattern is bound to reflect historical change, but any explanation for that change remains hypothetical. Among the possible hypotheses are changes in the organisation or living conditions of the necropolis workforce or their administration, or changes, economic or cultural, in the preference for certain writing materials.

The discussion in the previous sections leads to the modification of views – including my own – resulting from earlier research. Contrary to what is asserted in Egyptological literature, there is no sudden decrease in ostraca in the late Twentieth Dynasty. As can be seen from table 5.2, that decrease is more gradual, and sets in after the reign of Ramesses IV, that is, well before the middle of the Twentieth Dynasty. Nor is there an explosive growth in the number of documentary papyri at the end of the dynasty. Table 5.1 rather suggests a steady production of such papyri from the late years of Ramesses III until the late years of Ramesses XI. Given the often-attested re-use of papyrus, the production of documentary papyri in the earlier Twentieth Dynasty may even have been more substantial than indicated by table 5.1. Re-use apart, the large number of documentary papyri from the very end of the dynasty is also due to the existence of specific groups, originating from specific circumstances: the Late Ramesside Letters and the Tomb-Robbery Papyri.

44 'Symbolizing Identity. Identity marks and their relation to writing in New Kingdom Egypt'. The project was supervised by the author and supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) from 2011 to 2015. See B. HARING, *From Single Sign to Pseudo-Script. An Ancient Egyptian System of Workmen's Identity Marks* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 93, Leiden – Boston, forthcoming 2018).

45 O.IFAO ONL 6185, 6282, 6685, 6711 and 6832 (found in the so-called Grand Puits in 1949) and related ostraca; see D.M. SOLIMAN, *Of Marks and Men. The Functional and Historical Context of the Workmen's Marks of the Royal Theban Necropolis* (PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2016), pp. 331–341. I am grateful to the IFAO for allowing the project team to search its ostraca archive in 2013 and 2014 for relevant pieces.

46 Judging, obviously, from the material that is preserved and can be interpreted and dated. See B. HARING – D. SOLIMAN, 'Reading Twentieth Dynasty Ostraca with Workmen's Marks', in: B.J.J. HARING – O.E. KAPER – R. 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* (EgUit 28, Leiden – Leuven, 2014), pp. 73–93.

A possible but purely hypothetical scenario accounting for the chronological spread of documentary ostraca preserved is as follows. In the early Twentieth Dynasty, Deir el-Medina scribes felt perfectly comfortable with chunks of limestone and pottery sherds, in addition to papyri, but in the course of that dynasty, for some reason, ostraca lost their attractiveness. By the reign of Ramesses x, hieratic documentary ostraca had become an unpopular type of record, at least with the local scribal elite. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the last dated ostraca from the workmen's settlement, about year 20 of Ramesses XI, are

in a semi-scribal mode including identity marks, being the products of less literate workmen. The so-called Renaissance that had set in by that time would soon alter the picture again. Under the directorship of priests and necropolis scribes, workmen would rebury the royal mummies, collect the associated precious materials, and leave accounts of these activities in numerous graffiti and on numerous ostraca. But the precise historical and documentary backgrounds of those ostraca, most of which are still unpublished, remain to be investigated.