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Popular, but unique? The early history of the royal necropolis workmen's marks

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Outside the Box

Selected papers from the conference

“Deir el-Medina and the Theban Necropolis in Contact”

Liège, 27-29 October 2014

Andreas DORN & Stéphane POLIS (eds.)



Presses Universitaires de Liège

Outside the Box

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Table of Contents

Andreas DORN, Todd J. GILLEN & Stéphane POLIS, Deir el-Medina studies. Current situation and future perspectives	7–16
Guillemette ANDREU-LANOË & Jacques PELEGRIN, La <i>fabrique</i> des ostraca en calcaire. Comment scribes et dessinateurs se procuraient-ils ces supports ?	17–25
Anne AUSTIN, Living and Dying at Deir el-Medina: An osteological analysis of the TT 290 assemblage	27–47
Patricia BERG, Textual references to mobility in necropolis journals and notes from Deir el-Medina	49–70
Anne BOUD’HORS, Moines et laïcs dans la nécropole thébaine (VII ^e –VIII ^e siècles). Frontières et interactions entre deux modes de vie	71–82
Massimo CULTRARO & Federica FACCHETTI, A foreign market revisited. New evidence of Mycenaean and Aegean-related pottery from Schiaparelli’s campaigns (1905–1909) at Deir el-Medina	83–96
Paolo DEL VESCO & Federico POOLE, Deir el-Medina in the Egyptian Museum of Turin. An overview, and the way forward	97–130
Rob J. DEMARÉE, A Late Ramesside ship’s log (Papyrus Turin 2098 + 2100/306 verso)	131–140
Andreas DORN, Graffiti de la Montagne Thébaine (GMT) 2012/2013: Old and new graffiti from Western Thebes. Report on the 1 st campaign of the “Graffiti in the valleys of Western Thebes project”	141–155
Kathrin GABLER, Can I stay or must I go? Relations between the Deir el-Medina community and their service personnel	157–189
Cédric GOBEIL, Archaeology in the archives. A <i>zir</i> -area at Deir el-Medina and its implications for the location of the <i>khetem</i>	191–216
Pierre GRANDET, Ostraca hiératiques documentaires de l’IFAO : quelques points notables	217–232
Ben HARING, Popular, but unique? The early history of the royal necropolis workmen’s marks	233–244
Khaled HASSAN & Stéphane POLIS, Extending the corpus of Amennakhte’s literary compositions. Palaeographical and textual connections between two ostraca (O. BM EA 21282 + O. Cairo HO 425)	245–264

Christine HUE-ARCÉ, The legal treatment of interpersonal violence in Deir el-Medina	265–279
Paolo MARINI, <i>Shabti</i> -boxes and their representation on wall paintings in tombs at Deir el-Medina	281–300
Bernard MATHIEU, Les « Caractères » : un genre littéraire de l'époque ramesside	301–332
Stephanie E. MCCLAIN, Authorship and attribution. Who wrote the twentieth dynasty journal of the necropolis?	333–364
Aurore MOTTE, Observations on the <i>Reden und Rufe</i> in the workmen's tombs of Deir el-Medina	365–381
Hana NAVRATILOVA, An elusive community: Traces of necropolis workmen in Memphis?	383–406
Chloé C.D. RAGAZZOLI, Graffiti and secondary epigraphy in Deir el-Medina. A progress report	407–420
Anne-Claire SALMAS, Space and society at Deir el-Medina. Delineating the territory of a specific 'social group'	421–445
Deborah SWEENEY, Cattle at Deir el-Medina	447–464
Julia TROCHE, The living dead at Deir el-Medina	465–475
Pascal VERNUS, The circulation of "literary" texts in the Deir el-Medina community. Two opposite cases	477–492
Jean WINAND, Dialectal, sociolectal and idiolectal variations in the late Egyptian texts from Deir el-Medineh and the Theban area	493–524
Index	525–539

Popular, but unique?

The early history of the royal necropolis workmen's marks

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Abstract. This article presents a possible background for the use of workmen's identity marks in the Theban royal necropolis prior to the Amarna Period. The application of similar marks in the Ramesside Period appears to have been stimulated by an increasing local use of writing, but in the early Eighteenth Dynasty, literacy in the workmen's community must have been very low. The origin of the system of workmen's marks in that period must probably be sought in even older marking systems, the most likely inspiration being the team marks used in building projects in the Old and Middle Kingdoms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning in 2011, the research project 'Symbolizing Identity' has elucidated more and more details and fundamentals of the system of identity marks used by the Deir el-Medina workmen.¹ The marks, which served to identify individual workmen, can be found on various objects including pottery and ostraca, and in graffiti in the Theban mountains. When used as (post-firing) marks on pottery vessels, they represent a system that is also attested on New Kingdom pottery from other Egyptian sites, although the percentage of marked vessels is exceedingly small there when compared to the Theban necropolis. Other practices appear to be even more specific to that place, and the practice of composing administrative records with marks in the particular way that is illustrated by over a thousand Theban ostraca is probably unique in world history.²

That the system was so popular at Deir el-Medina, while being so poorly attested elsewhere may have been somehow connected with another remarkable feature of the workmen's community, a relatively wide-spread proficiency in reading and writing. Indeed, the ubiquity of pragmatic and monumental writing in the community may well have encouraged the use of an 'alternative' way of

¹ The project 'Symbolizing Identity. Identity marks and their relation to writing in New Kingdom Egypt' was carried out at the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) under the supervision of the author of the present article, and was supported by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), from May 2011 to August 2015. The research team included Kyra van der Moezel, Daniel Soliman, Rob Demarée, and Olaf Kaper. I am grateful to Mervyn Richardson for correcting my English.

² Previous discussions of the ostraca: Haring (2000; 2009a; 2009b; 2014; 2015a); Haring & Soliman (2014); Moezel & Soliman (2011); Soliman (2013). Graffiti: Fronczak & Rzepka (2009). Pottery: Aston (2009). Various objects (including furniture, implements, textiles): Killen & Weiss (2009). See now Haring (2018) for a synthesis.

graphic recording, a ‘pseudo-script,’ by scribes and semi-literates alike. However, this hypothesis fails to explain the popularity of the marks in the pre-Amarna period, from which virtually no traces of local administrative writing have survived. The early marks on ostraca seem to indicate that the system was only marginally connected with writing. The repertoire of marks shows far less overlap with hieroglyphic writing than what we see in the Ramesside Period, and no overlap with hieratic.³ Other features of the Ramesside marking system, such as the integration of marks and writing, and the development of additional signs for objects, quantities and calendar dates, are almost entirely absent in the Eighteenth Dynasty material.

2. MARKS, WRITING AND LITERACY

The necropolis workmen and their families at Deir el-Medina are generally considered to have been an exceptionally literate community. Some estimates of the local rate of literacy reach about forty percent,⁴ a remarkable figure given that literacy in Pharaonic Egypt as a whole is thought never to have exceeded (and perhaps never to have reached) one percent.⁵

Such estimates require much caution and many refinements. Firstly, as far as Deir el-Medina itself is concerned, the high estimate of forty percent applies only to the late Ramesside Period, and more precisely to the first half of the Twentieth Dynasty. This was the period in which the production of hieratic texts reached its maximum, judging from the number of hieratic ostraca preserved. But without further large-scale palaeographic research we do not know how many scribes and other individuals were involved in producing ostraca. Most may have been the work of a small group. The actual number of ostraca was not the basis for the quantitative assessments made by Baines, Eyre and Janssen. What was more important to them was the observation that there were many persons who called themselves ‘scribe’, and that there are indications for administrators’ assistants and family having some degree of scribal competence.

Secondly, it is one thing to calculate the percentage or number of literates, but it is quite another thing to establish degrees and sorts of literacy. Those included in the forty percent were thought to be ‘fully’ literate, some even ‘highly’ literate. But were they all thoroughly familiar with writing, and were they able to compose texts of different genres? Whatever degree of competence in writing and understanding texts they may have had, at Deir el-Medina it is bound to have been supplemented by familiarity with other types of visual communication, such as imagery on monuments, figured ostraca, or the identity marks that are the subject of this paper.

Finally, despite the presence of writing and other sorts of visual codes, the local culture of the workmen’s community remained essentially oral throughout the New Kingdom. As I have argued earlier,⁶ the production of hieratic documentary ostraca increased steadily over the course of the Nineteenth Dynasty, and dramatically in the early Twentieth, mainly due to the growing number of texts about the private and legal concerns of the workmen and their families. This is linked in turn with a growing attention of the scribes to life in the village and to an increase in the number of literates.

³ Haring (2009b).

⁴ For which, see Janssen (1992).

⁵ Baines & Eyre (2007).

⁶ Haring (2003).

We presume that during the Eighteenth Dynasty local literacy was less than in the early Ramesside Period. The earliest hieratic ostraca that were locally discarded (and therefore probably locally produced), and which are clearly connected with the royal necropolis workforce, are from the reign of Seti I.⁷ In the preceding period no relevant hieratic ostraca seem to have been discarded at Deir el-Medina or in the Valley of the Kings. Perhaps none were locally produced. Among the numerous hieratic and hieroglyphic graffiti in the Theban mountains virtually none are datable to the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁸ There is some epigraphic evidence for Eighteenth Dynasty overseers and administrators of royal tomb construction,⁹ suggesting that supreme responsibility lay with high Theban authorities, such as the mayor of Thebes or the high priest of the Karnak temple. Overseers of tomb construction like Kha (TT 8) and ‘scribes of the great Place’ like Amenemope (i) may have been living and working in the Theban necropolis, but no document from their hands has survived. A papyrus fragment recently discovered in the Egyptian Museum at Turin, and originally from the Valley of the Queens, shows several lines of a letter about necropolis supplies by an overseer of the royal treasury called Djehutinefer.¹⁰ The text can therefore be dated to the reign of Thutmose III or Amenhotep II, and may conceivably have been received by Kha, Amenemope (i), or some other local necropolis administrator, but it was clearly issued from a much higher, central administrative level. This hieratic text is the only document from the Eighteenth Dynasty known at present that is likely to be a product of the administration of the royal necropolis.

Apart from the extreme scarcity of locally discarded hieratic texts, there are two further indications of a lower level of literacy among the workmen of the royal necropolis in the Eighteenth Dynasty. One is the quality of private tomb decoration at Deir el-Medina, especially that of the hieroglyphic texts. In the tomb of the necropolis workman (*sḏm-ḥ*) Amenemhat of the early Eighteenth Dynasty (TT 340), which was decorated by his son Sennefer, we see that the compositions and proportions of the tomb scenes are rather crude, and the hieroglyphic captions show a very limited knowledge of hieroglyphic orthography.¹¹ Unabashed by his shortcomings, Sennefer assures his readers, “As for me, I am a son who writes accurately (reading *sḏ sḥy mty*), who causes [his?] name (*i.e.*, his father’s name) to live.”¹² Even the inscriptions in the tomb of Kha, where the decoration is of a better quality, reveal a limited competence in writing hieroglyphs.¹³ This makes us wonder how the superior decoration and inscriptions of the Eighteenth Dynasty royal tombs, supposedly the products of the same workmen’s community, were devised and made. This same question arises for the Ramesside Period. How much expertise was available for executing the intricate funerary texts and scenes is not known. Some of it could well have come from outside.¹⁴

A final indication of limited local literacy is found in the use and style of workmen’s marks on Eighteenth Dynasty ostraca. The total number of ostraca inscribed with workmen’s marks that can

⁷ Haring (2006: 109); Dorn (2011).

⁸ One possible exception is graffito 1670, for which see *e.g.* Russo (2012: 57).

⁹ Haring (2006: 108–109; 2014: 89–92). See especially Soliman (2016).

¹⁰ The papyrus (prov. no. 3581) was discovered in 2014 by Rob Demarée, who kindly showed me a photograph and discussed the text with me.

¹¹ Apparent from the unusual frequency of uniliteral signs, the acrophonic use of multiliteral signs, omissions of signs, odd reversions in sign and word order, and the use of inappropriate signs and grammar: Kruchten (1999); Laboury (2013: 34–35).

¹² Kruchten (1999: 44 [d]).

¹³ As shown by Vandier d’Abbadie (1939: 8–13 and plates).

¹⁴ See, *e.g.*, Haring (2015b: 72–74).

now be assigned to this dynasty (mainly, or exclusively pre-Amarna) is 169. The very presence of these ostraca, which were found at Deir el-Medina as well as in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens, suggests that the absence of hieratic counterparts is not a coincidence. Of any that were made and discarded at the same sites, why are none preserved? On balance, therefore, we may conclude that the ostraca with marks are the only type of administrative ostraca that was locally discarded. Any records produced in hieratic — and I assume there were some — must have been kept somewhere else, perhaps in the offices of necropolis overseers at a higher administrative level. The style of many ostraca with marks suggests that they were locally made, very probably by workmen or their immediate supervisors on the spot.¹⁵ The marks on these ostraca were often arranged in horizontal rows, but they may also be scattered over the surface without any apparent ordering. They were sometimes made by persons who were familiar with hieroglyphs, but none shows any influence of the hand of a hieratic scribe. Some of the marks on the ostraca are large and crude (see Fig. 1) because the brushes used for painting them were much thicker than those used by scribes.



Figure 1. Ostraca Cairo CG 24105 (48 cm × 13 cm) and WV 22, no. 1 (14 cm × 16 cm) (respectively from Daressy [1902: pl. XVIII] and Yoshimura & Kondo [2004: 209])

The number of ostraca with workmen's marks increased in the Ramesside Period. A total of 178 ostraca can now be ascribed to the Nineteenth Dynasty, a period less than half as long as the Eighteenth, for which there are only 169. For the Twentieth Dynasty, which lasted only a little longer than the Nineteenth, there are 446 datable ostraca.¹⁶ These numbers are small when compared to the thousands of documentary hieratic ostraca, but just like the hieratic ostraca they show exponential growth over the course of the centuries. This means that the use of marks for the composition of documentary ostraca rose together with the use of hieratic for the same purpose. This is probably no coincidence, for the use of marks was stimulated by writing. A similar trend can be seen with graffiti. As yet no graffiti, featuring either hieratic or workmen's marks, can be attributed to the Eighteenth Dynasty with certainty, but both types of graffiti are abundantly attested for the Ramesside Period.¹⁷

The repertoire and individual forms of marks on Twentieth Dynasty ostraca show more influence of hieroglyphic (and even hieratic) writing than older pieces.¹⁸ The proportion of marks inspired by writing rose from approximately fifty percent of the repertoire in the Eighteenth Dynasty, to more than eighty percent in the Ramesside Period. The remaining twenty percent involved geometric forms and creatures and objects not inspired by hieroglyphic. In addition, the marks were 'adopted' by scribes of hieratic ostraca, who sometimes incorporated marks into their records. Their accomplished

¹⁵ Haring (2014: 95–98).

¹⁶ A group of 118 ostraca cannot be dated more precisely than 'Ramesside', another 166 not more precisely than 'New Kingdom'.

¹⁷ Fronczak & Rzepka (2009).

¹⁸ See Haring (2009b).

hands can also be detected in the hieratic ductus of many ostraca inscribed only with marks. By contrast, administrators less familiar with hieratic developed a sort of pseudo-script, in which marks were combined with calendar dates, numbers, and additional signs for commodities and their suppliers.¹⁹

All this was still far away in the Eighteenth Dynasty. We are probably justified in regarding the ostraca with marks of this period as a means of local record-keeping by the necropolis workmen and their immediate supervisors, most or all of whom had a very limited knowledge of writing. What could have been the origin of this practice?

3. THE EARLIEST MARKS

The earliest datable ostraca with marks are from the reign of Thutmose III/Hatshepsut.²⁰ Some (JE 72490, 72494, 72498) were found in the narrow *wadi* leading to the tomb of this king (KV 34). One (Cairo CG 25321) was found by Victor Loret in (or near) KV 37, an undecorated tomb close to KV 34 that is also thought to date from the reign of Thutmose III.²¹ In view of the repertoire of marks, this small corpus of ostraca must predate two other archaeologically datable groups, one found near the entrance to the tomb of Amenhotep II (KV 35), the other found during the excavations of the tomb of Amenhotep III (WV 22).²²

The marks shown on the ostraca from the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II and III are also found at Deir el-Medina. They occur on ostraca, as potmarks on ceramic vessels, and as property marks on other objects, including the textiles and other items from tomb TT 8 of Kha, overseer of royal tomb construction under Amenhotep III. The same marks are known from pottery vessels in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens. As David Aston has noted, marked pottery from the New Kingdom is, ‘relatively speaking, exceedingly rare’ at the major settlement and burial sites (Amarna, Gurob, Malqata, Qantir, Saqqara), with the single exception of the Theban necropolis, including Deir el-Medina.²³ Marking pottery on the scale seen there was therefore exceptional, as was the practice of using the same marks on ostraca.

Whether or not the pottery was marked, the earliest datable material from the Valley of the Kings is pottery also from the reign of Thutmose III/Hatshepsut.²⁴ This situation is connected with the discussion about the earliest royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. It is highly uncertain if the tombs assigned to Thutmose I and II in the valley date from the reigns of these kings, while the tomb of Amenhotep I has been identified at Dra Abu el-Naga.²⁵ On the basis of the location and axis of the temple of Thutmose II, Andreas Dorn has suggested that the tomb of this king might have been constructed in the valley of the Queens, and that the same could be true for Thutmose I.²⁶ However, Dorn does not identify any of the tombs found in the valley as belonging to one of these kings. In this respect one highly intriguing find from the Valley of the Queens deserves to be mentioned: the pottery sherds on which marks belonging to Eighteenth Dynasty workmen of the royal necropolis were

¹⁹ For which, see Haring & Soliman (2014).

²⁰ The four ostraca specified in this paragraph make up ‘core group A’ in Soliman (2016).

²¹ Daressy (1901: 82). See also Soliman (2013: 158–159).

²² Haring (2009a: 152–153); Soliman (2013: 158). For an overview, see Haring (2018: 158–168).

²³ Aston (2009: 52).

²⁴ Aston (2015: 85–86). I am grateful to the author for allowing me to consult this book before publication.

²⁵ Polz (2007: 172–229); Haring (2014: 90–92); Aston (2015: 85–86).

²⁶ Dorn (2013: 35).

scratched (see Fig. 2). These sherds were found in tomb QV 34.²⁷ This tomb and the surrounding ones are dated to the early Nineteenth Dynasty, but the finds made in QV 34 also belong to different periods, and the workmen's marks shown in Fig. 2 are unmistakably those of the pre-Amarna period. The only datable groups of ostraca showing mark 𓆎 are from the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. It would seem that workmen from the royal necropolis were active in the Valley of the Queens under these kings or even earlier.

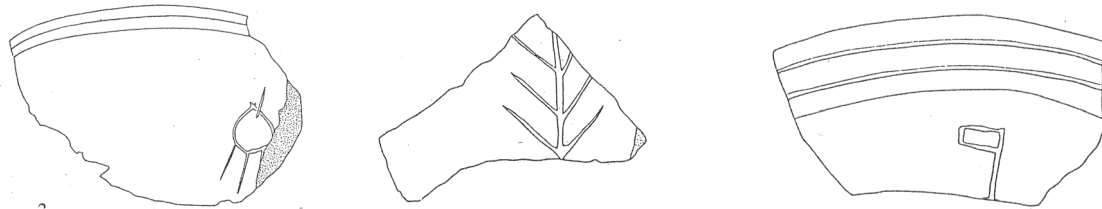


Figure 2. Marked pottery from QV 34 (from Fekri & Loyrette 1998: 130)

4. WERE POTMARKS THE INSPIRATION?

Given the present state of documentation, the history of the workmen's marks of the Theban royal necropolis would appear to have started under Thutmose III/Hatshepsut. The same is true, as we have seen, for pottery from the Valley of the Kings and for the history of royal tomb construction there. This makes it difficult to establish the origin of this particular marking system. It is unlikely that it was invented within the workmen's community or by senior administrators independently from contemporary or earlier systems, for we know that marking systems had a very long history in Pharaonic Egypt. The habit of marking objects, especially pottery, dates back at least to the late fourth millennium B.C. Marks had been used for many centuries at building sites and in quarries, and they were also used for marking tools and for branding cattle.²⁸ Potmarks could be a possible source of the necropolis workmen's marks, since these appear on many vessels and sherds as early as the ostraca. We have already seen, however, that marked pottery was otherwise relatively rare during the New Kingdom, so we would have to assume that potmarks became suddenly very popular in the Theban necropolis at the time of Thutmose III or earlier. The beginning of the New Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period are a virtual blank for marked pottery from the Theban necropolis. The principal site where we find pottery from a time preceding that of Thutmose III is Dra Abu el-Naga, the royal necropolis of the Seventeenth Dynasty and probably also of the early Eighteenth. The mark, or rather decoration 𓆎 (*iʿh*),²⁹ applied in relief on some of this pottery seems unrelated to the type of marks discussed here. Pre-fired marks that also occur at this site are usually simple.³⁰ Some incompletely preserved specimens of more complex types could have been similar to the later Deir el-Medina marks, but it is unlikely that there was any continuity between these pre-fired marks on pottery from funerary deposits at Dra Abu el-Naga on the one hand, and the post-fired marks on much later pottery left by necropolis workmen on the other.

²⁷ Fekri & Loyrette (1998: 129–130).

²⁸ For all these uses of marking systems, in Ancient Egypt and elsewhere, see Haring & Kaper (2009); Andrassy *et al.* (2009); Haring (2018: 39–57).

²⁹ Polz (2007: 16–18).

³⁰ I wish to thank Susanne Michels of the German Archaeological Institute at Cairo (DAI) for kindly supplying me with images of these marks.

In view of the fact that marks were scarce on New Kingdom pottery in general and even on pottery from the Theban royal necropoleis of the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Dynasties, it is difficult to substantiate the hypothesis that the Egyptian tradition of potmarks inspired the workmen's marks in the Theban necropolis. Even the repertoire of potmarks of older periods does not support that hypothesis. The numerous potmarks recorded for the huge corpus of Middle Kingdom pottery from Kahun are almost all very simple and linear, and hardly any show the hieroglyphs and other types of figures that typify the Theban workmen's marks.³¹

When considering potmarks as the possible origin of the Theban necropolis workmen's marks, due attention should also be given to foreign pottery in Egypt, especially the Mycenaean imports, which were immensely popular. Mycenaean pottery is found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world, and substantial quantities occur at many New Kingdom sites, including Deir el-Medina. It includes vessels engraved with marks of more or less complex linear types, which in theory could have inspired the workmen's marks.³² However, the Mycenaean pottery found at Deir el-Medina is mainly of Ramesside date and is scarcely marked.³³ Canaanite pottery from Deir el-Medina shows more marks, but mostly postdates the Eighteenth Dynasty.³⁴ Minoan and Cypriot pottery are known from Eighteenth Dynasty contexts in Egypt. Cypriot pottery has been found at Deir el-Medina, but marks on Cypriot vessels are rare and very simple.³⁵ All this suggests that marks on foreign pottery are an unlikely background for the Theban necropolis workmen's marks.³⁶

5. WERE BUILDERS' MARKS AND QUARRY MARKS THE INSPIRATION?

The fact that neither pottery nor ostraca with the characteristic necropolis workmen's marks can be dated earlier than Thutmose III/Hatshepsut remains remarkable. Since potmarks from earlier periods do not recommend themselves as a likely source of inspiration, the repertoire of workmen's marks may have come from a different tradition, to be used simultaneously on pottery as well as on ostraca.

A very similar repertoire of marks is found among the signs and notes on the blocks of monumental buildings of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms (see Fig. 3). The teams that transported the blocks from the quarries and placed them in position in the monuments under construction made those marks. Some could be quarry marks, but this is difficult to prove unless the same marks are found in the quarries.³⁷ Most of these marks are thought to relate to transport. The transport teams were organized hierarchically. At the top were the 'crews' (*ḥpr.w*), which were subdivided into 'phyles' (*s3.w*), which in turn were subdivided into 'teams' (*ts.wt*). The names of crews and *phyles* are often mentioned in hieratic writing, but *phyle* names could also be abbreviated to single marks, and teams were only ever referred to by such marks. Some marks are geometric, others pictorial or hieroglyphic.

³¹ Gallorini (2009).

³² See Stubbings (1951: 45–52), for marks on Mycenaean pottery from the Levant.

³³ As Laurent Bavay was kind enough to inform me via an email (December 2006), in which he mentions one sherd with a fragmentary mark (scratched after firing) on a total of 274 sherds.

³⁴ See Bavay (2015).

³⁵ See Merrillees (1968: 121–124 [nos. 7–11]) for Deir el-Medina, and Merrillees (1968: pl. XXI) for marks (not including Deir el-Medina).

³⁶ An observation of some importance in view of earlier, erroneous interpretations of Egyptian potmarks and workmen's marks as foreign or Mediterranean, and even as alphabetic characters or their immediate prototypes. See the discussions by e.g., Haring (2000: 45–46); Aston (2009: 49–50); Haring (2018: 16–21).

³⁷ As happens in some quarries of the New Kingdom and the Late and Graeco-Roman Periods: Depauw (2009); Nilsson (2014); Nishimoto *et al.* (2002).

As with the New Kingdom necropolis workmen's marks, the distinction between the latter two categories is not always clear.³⁸ An important difference is that the workmen's marks of Deir el-Medina designated individual workmen, while the builders' marks of the Old and Middle Kingdom designated groups of individuals, by teams or *phyles*.³⁹



Figure 3. Team marks of the Old and Middle Kingdom (from Andrassy 2009: 18)

The same seems to apply to the marks used by builders of the temples of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III at Deir el-Bahri and Asasif. The local administration here produced hundreds of hieratic ostraca (to be contrasted with the remarkable lack of similar records of royal tomb construction), but the walls of these temples and their causeways are marked with numerous signs serving as control notes and benchmarks (see Fig. 4). In fact the repertoire of these marks also shows many similarities with the necropolis workmen's marks, but Julia Budka suggests they designate towns and institutions, meaning the groups of workmen coming from these towns and institutions.⁴⁰

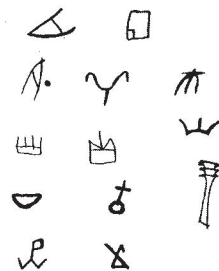


Figure 4. Marks from the causeway of Thutmose III, Asasif (from Budka 2009b: 184)

Some signs can be interpreted as a reference to an individual, but that could be the title or the name of a supervisor. For instance ꜥꜥ signifies the high priest of Amun, and ꜥꜥꜥꜥ a steward named Meryre, both of whom are also mentioned in Deir el-Bahri ostraca,⁴¹ as individuals who officially supervised the teams of workmen designated by the marks. Something similar already occurs on blocks of the late Old Kingdom and the late Middle Kingdom, when the names of functionaries often replaced the names of crews and towns.⁴² Thus, the Deir el-Bahri builders' marks appear to follow the centuries-old

³⁸ Andrassy (2009: 17–22); collection of types from the Old and Middle Kingdoms in Andrassy (2009: 16).

³⁹ A few possible indications for marks referring to individuals are discussed by Andrassy (2009: 22–25), who concludes that such a practice is not to be excluded, but lacks sufficient evidence, as virtually all material speaks in favour of collective designation.

⁴⁰ Budka (2009a; 2009b).

⁴¹ Budka (2009b: 190–191).

⁴² Andrassy (2009: 9).

tradition of team marks in royal building projects, whereas the workmen involved in the construction of the king's tomb had their own individual marks.

There are, however, indications that individual workmen identified themselves by their own marks when constructing other Eighteenth Dynasty monuments. Among the remains of the main gate of the small Aten temple at El-Amarna is a layer of plaster still showing the impressions of marks incised on the *talatat* blocks that once rested on this layer.⁴³ A few marked blocks were still lying about, but very many of them have been found at Hermopolis, having been reused after Akhenaten's reign.⁴⁴ At El-Amarna, we see only twelve to fourteen different marks, but at Hermopolis there are eighty-five. So many different marks on such small *talatat* blocks ($\pm 25 \text{ cm} \times 50 \text{ cm}$) suggests that each mason left his personal mark on the block for which he was responsible.⁴⁵ Again, as at Deir el-Medina and Deir el-Bahri, we have both geometric marks and pictorial or hieroglyphic ones. Similar marks have been discovered on blocks of the temple of Ay and Haremhab at Medinet Habu, together with hieratic notes saying 'work by/of NN' or simply mentioning a personal name.⁴⁶

Marks in some of the galleries of the limestone quarry of Qurna are all virtually identical with the necropolis workmen's marks from the pre-Amarna period (see Fig. 5).⁴⁷ The larger jackal figures may carry religious overtones, just like the religious imagery in quarries of later periods.⁴⁸ These particular galleries (numbered A-D) are thought to have been quarried during the reign of Amenhotep III, for blocks for the king's memorial temple at nearby Kom el-Hetan. It seems that those who left their marks in the quarry may very well also have been working at the tomb of that king (WV 22), judging from the marks on ostraca found there (see Fig. 1). Unless those marks are the casual graffiti of visitors, the men could have been employed here as quarrymen. We know too little about the organization of the royal necropolis workforce in this period to say if the construction of the king's tomb was their sole occupation, but the Qurna quarry marks may very well point to their involvement in temple building. This would tie in with the fact that royal tomb construction fell under the responsibility of temple officials according to some Eighteenth Dynasty sources.⁴⁹



Figure 5. Marks in the quarry of Qurna, gallery A (from Nishimoto *et al.* 2002: 26)

⁴³ Kemp (1989: 128 [fig. 6.12], 138–142).

⁴⁴ Roeder (1969: 6–8, pl. 219).

⁴⁵ As is suggested by Kemp (1989: 138–139).

⁴⁶ Hölscher (1939: 99).

⁴⁷ Nishimoto *et al.* (2002).

⁴⁸ See Nilsson (2014).

⁴⁹ See Dorn (2011: 36) and Haring (2014: 89–92); Haring (2018: 53–56).

6. CONCLUSION

The observations made in the two previous sections lead us to suppose that it was the marks employed in building projects rather than potmarks that inspired the workmen's marks of the royal necropolis in the early Eighteenth Dynasty. It seems to be a reasonable supposition, since these workmen were involved not just in any royal building project, but the royal building project *par excellence*, the king's tomb. They could well also have been involved in other building projects, such as quarrying stone for the memorial temple of Amenhotep III at Qurna, where they also left their personal marks. Furthermore, we cannot exclude the possibility that the necropolis workmen were also involved in temple building at Deir el-Bahri under Thutmose III and Hatshepsut.⁵⁰ Quarrying and temple building activities on the Theban west bank may well be the channels through which we should trace the marks, from the ancient tradition of workmen constructing monuments with stone blocks to the creation of royal rock tombs hidden in the Valley of the Kings. The finished, decorated walls of these tombs have not left any of the workmen's marks visible, but they do occur on unfinished parts.⁵¹

If we accept that the team marks of older periods were the precursors and inspiration for the necropolis workmen's marks of the New Kingdom, then we have to assume they developed from identifying groups to identifying individuals. For this the marks from the reign of Thutmose III from Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Kings would be the earliest examples. A high degree of literacy further stimulated the use of such marks in the Ramesside Period, but local literacy was much less widespread in the early Eighteenth Dynasty, and so it was probably not the main motivation for the development of these marks. The system of marks used by the workmen in the royal necropolis of the early New Kingdom implies an organization where the individual craftsman mattered, and where even with a low level of literacy he could express his identity.

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⁵⁰ Haring (2006: 107–108).

⁵¹ An image of one group of marks (𐎗, 𐎗 and 𐎗) in red paint in the tomb of Ramesses VI (KV 9) was presented by Adam Łukaszewicz at the conference 'Non-Textual Marking Systems in Ancient Egypt,' University of Warsaw, 16–18 December 2011. A 'Graffiti search' in the online database of the Theban Mapping Project gives 22 locations of 'Mason's marks,' not including KV 9 (http://www.thebanmappingproject.com/search/search_graffiti.asp, accessed June 2015); images found include lines on walls and ceilings, but no images of workmen's marks.

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COLLECTION
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La collection *Ægyptiaca Leodiensia* — dirigée par Dimitri Laboury, Stéphane Polis et Jean Winand — a pour vocation de publier des travaux d'égyptologie dans les domaines les plus divers. Elle accueille en son sein des monographies ainsi que des volumes collectifs thématiques.

This volume represents the outcome of the conference “Deir el-Medina and the Theban Necropolis in Contact: Describing the interactions within and outside the community of workmen” held in Liège in 2014 (27-29 October). The goal of this conference was to encourage a wider perspective on Deir el-Medina, bringing together scholars from all egyptological fields and disciplines who are interested in studying the many types of interactions that the ancient community of Deir el-Medina developed both internally and at the broader (supra-)regional level.

The title of the volume, “Outside the box,” refers to two important dimensions touched on by the papers in this volume. First, it points to the fact that a vast quantity of documents from Deir el-Medina and, more broadly, from the Theban Necropolis has been available for a long time to some restricted academic circles, but are now to be taken *outside the box*: this holds true not only for the publication of papyri and ostraca preserved in many collections across the world, but also for archival material describing the excavations at the site itself, and more broadly for the monuments that remain there still, but are not available to scholars or the general public. Second, most of the papers collected in this volume share a common feature, namely their attempt to think *outside the box*, using new theoretical frameworks, cross-disciplinary approaches, or inno-

vative technological solutions. Accordingly, “Outside the box,” can be read both as a plea for making the fascinating material from Deir el-Medina more broadly available, and as a shout of admiration regarding the creativity and tireless inventiveness of scholars working on the sources stemming from this exceptional socio-cultural setting.

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