

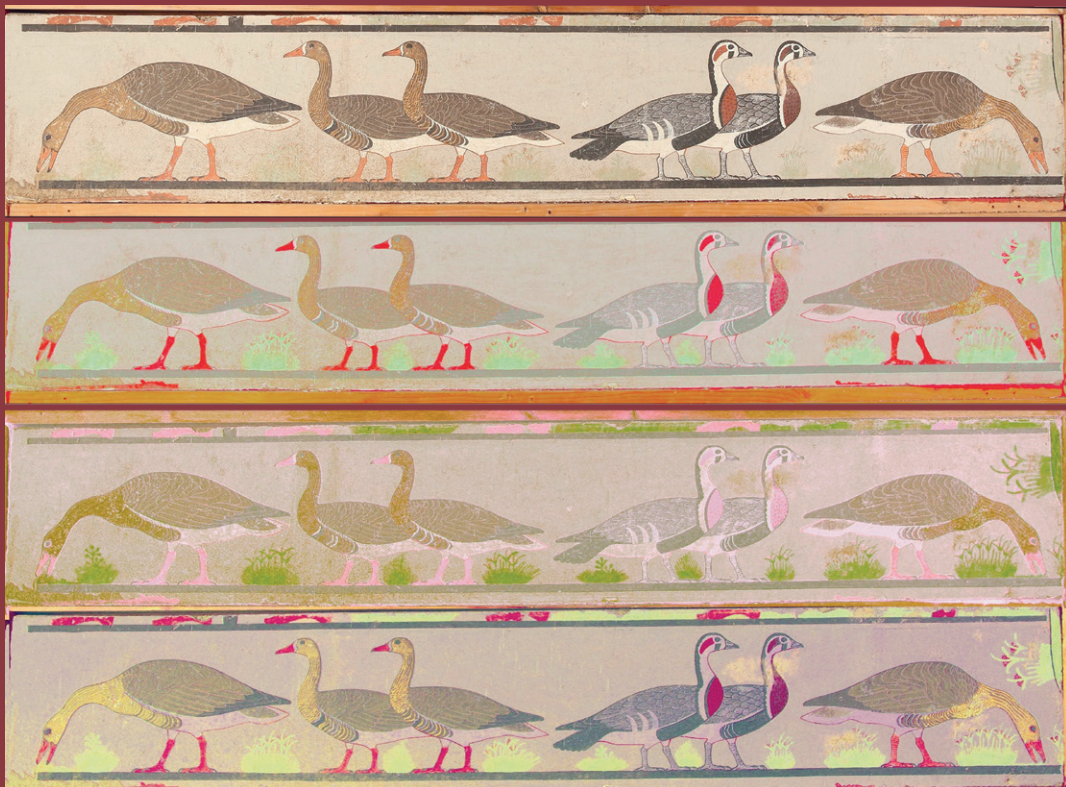
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X

SOCIAL LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Towards a Digital Edition of the Prosopography of the Priests of Akhmim from the Late Period to the Roman Period

PROSOPOGRAPHY is an historical method of analysis that is widely used in other historical disciplines, such as studies of the Roman Empire and Medieval and Modern Europe.¹ It is based on the Greek word “prosopon” which means “face” or “mask” and indicates that it deals with people: its goal is to study a given group of individuals by gathering the common traits of individual lives. It then aims to compare them in order to answer specific questions about this group and its characteristics. In this way, prosopography sheds new light on history, distinct from the history of events and the elite, focusing instead on what is common, for example social organisation and trends.

Katherine Keats-Rohan gives a definition—picked out of many similar ones—of the term and what it entails: “Prosopography is about what the analysis of the sum of data about many individuals can tell us about the different types of connection between them, and hence about how they operated within and upon the institutions—social, political, legal, economic, intellectual—of their time.”²

I have shown elsewhere what challenges stem from such an endeavour with Late Period Egyptian material and how careful one must be when trying to rebuild families out of scattered evidence.³ In this paper, my aim will be to address the question of how to build a digital project for prosopography. What are the possibilities for researchers? What are their qualities and limitations? How to choose between these, depending on the type of material available and the research prospects? These questions have been central to the progressive design of my current project. I will show how I chose one over the other and why.

1. DATABASE OR XML TEI FOR A DIGITAL PROJECT IN PROSOPOGRAPHY?

Historically, the first step of prosopography, i.e. collecting the same type of data about many individuals, has been conceived as the building of a database—be it on paper or digital: the researcher

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1. KEATS-ROHAN 2007.

2. KEATS-ROHAN 2000, p. 2.

3. CLAUDE 2021.

composes a questionnaire with the various categories of data that can be gathered for every individual in the chosen group (personal data, career data, social data...). Thus, small biographies can be sketched for each individual, following the same categories and order as for the others. The aim of prosopography is then to compare the contents of each field, which allows the emergence of new knowledge concerning the characteristics of the group studied and its place in society.

Having started with paper files which were then published in books, these methods have naturally evolved into digital databases over the last decades, following the same general principles of final organisation. The advantages of a digital database are numerous. Most of the studied corpuses remain open and the emergence of new material is always possible: digital projects make it easier to add new material to the database than a published book, which requires new editions or addenda. Moreover, a digital database allows cross-querying of data through MY-SQL queries: the results of a specific request are easily calculated by the software, whereas handling a book might be more complex in this respect.

As for the establishment of the actual prosopographical links between various sources considered as pertaining to the same individual (fig. 1), the structure of the database itself—if it is precise enough—makes it possible to distinguish between individuals themselves and the attestations of these individuals, thanks to the completion of three distinct tables: the first one contains each source under study, with fields describing its characteristics; the second contains each attestation of an individual (completed by the information about him or her, according to the pre-established questionnaire); only in a second step are the attestations of homonymous individuals compared in order to establish or discard their identity, thus creating a third table dedicated to individuals (fig. 2). In this way, it is always possible, when new data appear, to check the validity of the source association and the consistency of the data, without mixing the information from different sources. Of course, many more tables (onomastics, titles, deities, place names...) may be added to enrich the database according to the research questions pursued.

Yet, such databases have a major flaw: the link between the general context of the source and the individual data is irremediably broken. The data are separated from their context, and the researcher wishing to check something in the original source must refer to their publication when (and if) they are available elsewhere.

Therefore, in order to avoid this split between sources and their analysis, another possibility to build a prosopographical database is to link it directly to a digital publication of the sources. This may seem to take much longer than such a project already does, but there are many benefits to be gained.

In this perspective, particularly interesting in the case where a substantial part of the sources remains totally or partially unpublished, the digital project may take the form of a corpus encoded in XML TEI.⁴

Each source would then be published digitally, with a transcription, transliteration and translation of its contents accompanying the usual description fields (i.e. Dublin Core). A second step consists

4. About the XML Text Encoding Initiative, see <https://tei-c.org/about/history/>, accessed on 11 November 2021; for the norm applied to ancient epigraphical texts, see <https://sourceforge.net/p/epidoc/wiki/About/>, accessed on 11 November 2021.

in encoding the data contained in these texts directly into the digital edition, according to the various fields required for the prosopographical study (name, titles, relationships, biographical data, dates...). Just as with a database, a system of identifiers for each attestation of an individual is implemented and used to identify multiple attestations of the same individual, the difference being that the data is not sporadically inserted into the tables of a database, but collected directly from the digital edition and always linked back to it.

This encoding system makes it possible to create web pages dedicated to each individual, containing all connected data, in a typically prosopographical way. It also allows to automatically generate indexes of names, titles, etc., the main advantage being that it is always quite easy to go back to the original source for each slip of data and check the context, reading and other information it contains.

Another perk of this system is that the encoding of the original sources can always be enhanced: not only can it be used to construct a prosopography, but the material thus made available can be enriched for other projects—be they dedicated to studies of grammar, linguistics, religion, toponymy, art history... Once the encoding of the source itself—both the physical object and its contents in terms of text and iconography—is complete, many research projects can use it as a basis, each adding a new layer of encoding and expanding on the previous work.

While a database requires a very rigorous structure of its different tables, decided upon as early as the beginning of the development of the project, XML TEI encoding is much more flexible, since it is based on the encoding of the material itself, and not on the organisation of the data copied from the sources.

Therefore, the two main options for the study of epigraphic material and its contents each have their own advantages and disadvantages, depending on the type of sources and the time and funds available. When a well-published or easily accessible corpus of documents is used, it may not be necessary to create a new XML edition of the sources; on the contrary, scattered and unpublished texts, connecting sources from various categories, may call for a virtual re-uniting through a digital edition.

2. THE CASE OF THE AKHMIM MATERIAL

In the case of the material on which my project is based, there are many aspects to consider when choosing a methodology. The prosopography focuses on a specific group of people, the priests of the city of Akhmim in Upper Egypt, from the Late Period to the Roman Period. In Akhmim, a large necropolis from this time was excavated and contained the funerary material (stelae, coffins, offering tables, papyrus, Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statues...) inscribed in hieroglyphs⁵ of the inhabitants who could afford such objects, most of whom were priests. These objects contain various texts including the name and titles of the deceased, as well as their filiation and sometimes other ascendants,

5. For partial studies or gathering of some of these objects, see: for stelae, MUNRO 1973; for coffins, BRECH 2008; for offering tables, CLAUDE, LIPPERT 2018; for papyrus, MOSHER 2001; for Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statues, RINDI NUZZOLO 2017.

whether in the paternal or, more rarely, maternal line. Sometimes other types of information are recorded, such as some autobiographical remarks or career details—all information suitable for prosopographical analysis.

Yet, the material from the Akhmim necropolis presents some difficulties: it was mainly excavated during the last two decades of the 19th century after its discovery by Gaston Maspero and was also, unfortunately, massively looted. Due to the laws of the time, the material from these tombs was dispersed all over the world, some of it being sold to travellers in Akhmim, some of it going to the Boulaq museum (now the Cairo museum), which has kept some of the objects and sold others in its own sales room.⁶ One of the first hurdles at the beginning of this project was therefore to gather the objects scattered in museums and private collections around the world. This is still a work in progress, but so far about 750 objects have been gathered from about 180 different collections.

As a result, the publication status of these objects is very diverse: some are well known and have been studied in detail in books or papers; others are only partially published in a museum catalogue, with or without photographs or copies of the texts; others still remain hidden in small museums or private collections, kept in storage and forgotten. In any case, even when published, they have been made available in dispersed studies, and the coherence of these objects as the funerary material of an individual, a family or even a social group has been irremediably lost.

In this respect, a digital publication of the entire corpus would be decisive for the virtual reunification of the material, beyond the hazards of its recent history.

Moreover, prosopography is not the only research project that can be carried out through the study of this material. While I will first and foremost focus on editing texts containing prosopographical data, the objects are also inscribed with funerary texts and decorated with images, some of which are specific to the local tradition and deserve to be studied; a closer examination could also shed light on various scribal practices and ateliers, for example.

Therefore, the choice of an XML TEI encoding for the material of Akhmim and its study seems preferable to a regular database, given the specificities of the sources and the multiplicity of research questions that may be applied and cross-referenced in this way. Starting with a prosopographical project, the digital publication of the Akhmim material could eventually encompass various aspects of current research trends in Egyptology.

3. DIGITALLY REUNITED DATA AND ITS ANALYSIS

The digital publication of the corpus and its encoding according to the demands of prosopographical research questions does not constitute the conclusion of the study. Indeed, gathering and encoding the data is but the first step of the project, a preliminary work aiming at organising the data to allow for a more efficient research.

The point of a prosopographical study is to yield information on a group of persons who are part of a society, regulated by its own rules and organisation. By structuring the raw data, by identifying the sources referring to each individual, each family, each period, it becomes possible to analyse the recurrent patterns of organisation of the group under study.

6. KUHLMANN 1983, pp. 53–58 ; CLAUDE 2020.

It is clear that only a careful consideration of the data can provide a solid basis for such an endeavour, which should not be rushed; yet, a database or digital publishing project should not be the end of the research work either, but only a tool for further analysis.

In the case of the material concerning the priests of Akhmim in the Late Period, the main data consists of names, titles and family relationships. Therefore, one of the main objectives of the study is to reconstruct genealogical trees based on the different sources and use them to investigate various societal issues.

Such an avenue of research focuses on the titles and their transmission: how were titles inherited within a family, from father to son and mother to daughter? Are other patterns of inheritance attested? How did an individual make a career for himself? Which titles were most valued and important?

The family relationships are also an important field of investigation: can matrimonial strategies be evidenced through the alliances between families? How were such alliances decided upon? Does family status influence marriage prospects? Were marriages endogamous or exogamous? What do onomastics and the transmission of names say about intergenerational dynamics and possible personal piety?

Many research questions can be investigated through the interconnection of scattered data by such a prosopographical project and its development, which is still ongoing and will contribute to improving the knowledge of Late Period Egyptian elites in the provinces, hopefully also through the combining of interdisciplinary studies.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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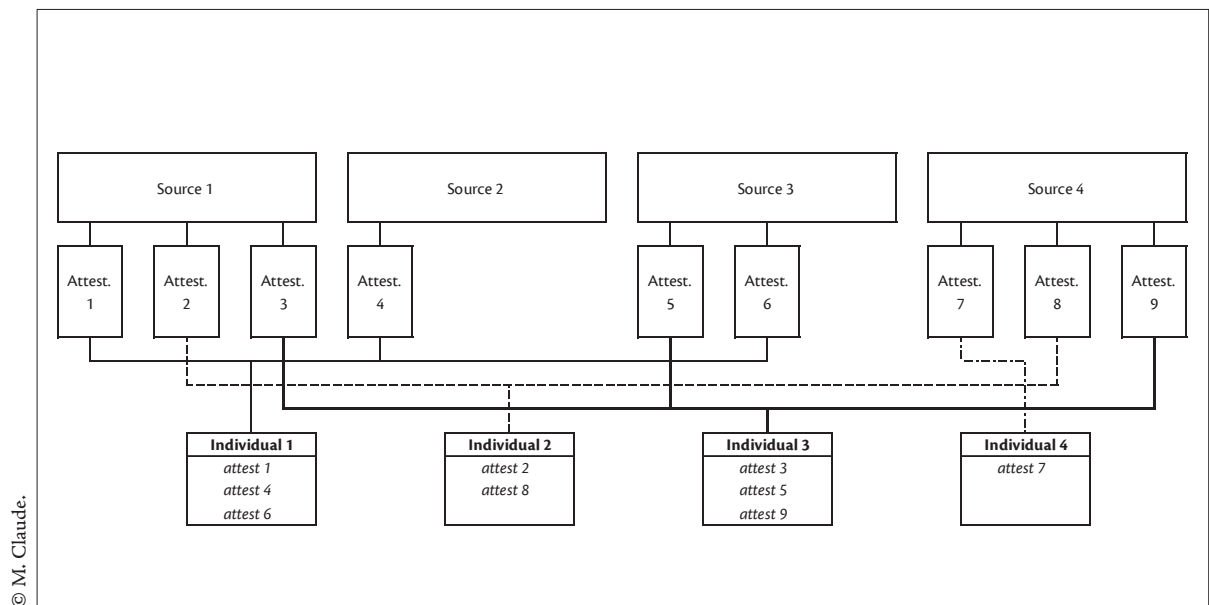


Fig. 1. Structure of the logical links between sources, attestations and individuals.

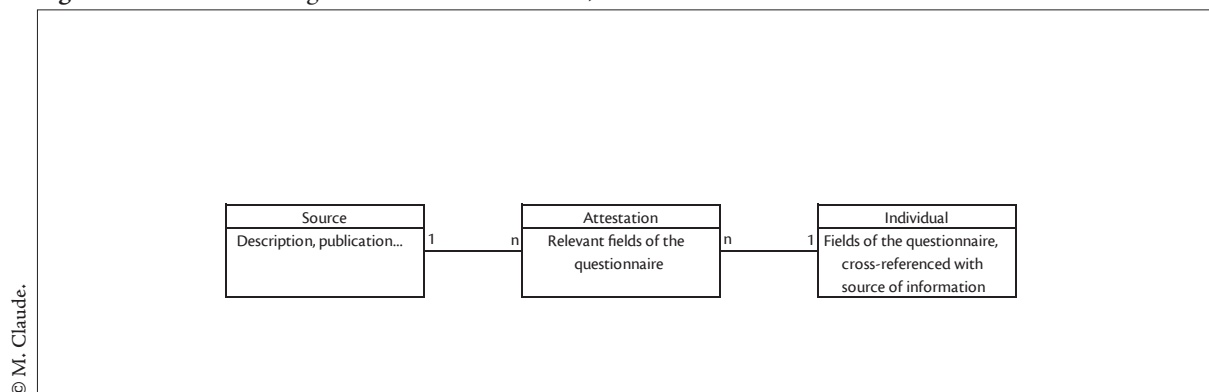


Fig. 2. Structure of the three core tables of a prosopographical database.

Deir el-Medina in the Ramesside Period: 250 Years of Changes and Developments

Exemplified by the Service Personnel, the *smd.t n p3 hr*

THIS CONTRIBUTION¹ summarises my PhD about the *service personnel* of Deir el-Medina, and presents its most important results. Comparing textual and archaeological evidence from a diachronic perspective, my study demonstrates that the development of Deir el-Medina in the Ramesside period was characterised by constant changes due to geographical, administrative, social, political, and economic factors.

I. THE TERM *SMD.T*

The service staff of Deir el-Medina is often referred to by the terms *smd.t bnr* or *smd.t n p3 hr*. There are over ten different professions that supplied the workmen and their families in the village and at the construction sites with food, materials, and the tools needed for their daily life and the building of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens.² Following various studies on the different supply professions,³ the actual individuals who may be identified by the general term *smd.t* remain an unanswered question.⁴ The main goal of my PhD project was to determine who belonged to the *smd.t n p3 hr* and to identify its individual members. My work was completed in 2016 and the *Who's Who around Deir el-Medina* was published in 2018.⁵

The term *smd.t* is attested outside of Deir el-Medina in 64 sources, from the First Intermediate Period until the Roman times.⁶ Most of them date from the New Kingdom and are related to labourers of an institution.⁷ In these contexts, the term designates a group of people on the margins of society and the usually non-specific tasks assigned to them.⁸ Younger men were favoured because of their greater physical strength. The labourers were socially and geographically marginal,⁹ this fits well

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1. I am grateful to Daniel Waller for improving the English of this article.

2. GABLER 2018a, p. 18, table 1, pp. 580–583.

3. GABLER 2018a, pp. 24–25.

4. PEET 1930, p. 14; JANSSEN 1997, p. 38; GABLER 2018a, pp. 24–25.

5. GABLER 2018a; GABLER 2018b, pp. 191–218; GABLER 2018c, pp. 157–189.

6. MEEKS 2014, pp. 90–100; GABLER 2018a, table 8, pp. 37–47, 595–608.

7. Other attestations refer to a rule, cadre, or concept; MEEKS 2014, pp. 99–100.

8. MEEKS 2014, pp. 90–100; QUACK 2005, pp. 63–65.

9. GABLER 2018a, pp. 39–47.

with Deir el-Medina's location on the outskirts of the desert: the members of its *smd.t* moved with their goods and products between the village, the construction sites, the agricultural areas, and the temples.

28 administrative texts from Deir el-Medina mention the word *smd.t*, most of them dating to the 20th Dynasty. The earliest reference is in year 2 of Merenptah.¹⁰ The designation for the staff varies within the same text: different combinations, shortcuts, and paraphrases are possible and exchangeable.¹¹ The tasks of its members contributed to the supply of the inhabitants of the village and the workers on the building sites. Besides basic foodstuffs (water, grain, fish) and materials, every article delivered to the settlement and the royal valleys that would have facilitated their smooth functioning was of potential interest to my study. It was necessary to check the entire body of published (and where possible unpublished) textual evidence to gain information about the deliverers, deliveries and products.¹² The result was the investigation of 18 professions in the same pattern: the title, its attestations and the dating of sources and people were collected; the tasks and the items delivered were discussed—in a diachronic perspective. Next, information about contacts and origins was presented, as well as case studies or examples of well-attested (or all) title-holders and deliverers. Finally, I examined whether a profession might have been part of the *smd.t n ꜥꜥ ḥꜣr* at particular times.¹³ The corpus of relevant sources included 1 500 documents, mainly ostraca and papyri, but also stelae, tombs, etc.¹⁴ In total, about 600 persons can be identified in Ramesside times.¹⁵

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEIR EL-MEDINA IN THE RAMESSIDE PERIOD

Deir el-Medina was reorganised in the early 19th Dynasty,¹⁶ when the kings shifted their capital from Thebes to Memphis, then to Pi-Ramesses. However, they kept the royal necropolis, the 'Valley of the Kings'. The standard for Ramesside royal tombs is a visible monumental structure, decorated in painted raised relief.¹⁷ The excavation of such tombs and the ideal preparation of all parts for relief painting was a much bigger effort than that required for the smaller Thutmoside royal tombs, where only a few sections were decorated.¹⁸ The change to an entirely carved and painted decoration (which stemmed from the reign of Horemheb) and the addition of skilled craftsmen such as draughtsmen to the community were mutually determined. Such professions were now permanently required in the building process.¹⁹ The village was extended to the South, to include 68 houses, the number of workmen increased to 40,²⁰ who were responsible for the construction of the longest tomb, KV 17. The number

10. GABLER 2018a, pp. 26–29, O. Cairo CG 25581.

11. GABLER 2018b, pp. 191–218.

12. GABLER 2018a, pp. 51–59; GABLER 2018b, pp. 191–218.

13. GABLER 2018a and <http://dmd.wepwawet.nl/smd.t> lists, 20.10.2020.

14. GABLER 2018a, pp. 442–445.

15. 27 of them are mentioned in DAVIES 1999.

16. HARING 2014, pp. 87–100.

17. GABLER 2018a, p. 528.

18. REEVES, WILKINSON 2001.

19. Skilled workers from Karnak moving to Deir el-Medina are indicated by epithets like *n Jmn* or *Jp.t-sw.t*.

20. DORN 2011, pp. 31–52.

of inhabitants grew too large to be sustained through any subsistence farming, and the workmen were constantly occupied with building big tombs, also in the Valley of the Queens from the time of Ramesses II onwards. By adapting some former tasks, which were originally organised within the community, by a *service personnel*, the workers could stay in the Valley of the Kings during the week.²¹

About 50 suppliers can be identified as sons of workers' families during the reigns of Seti I and Ramesses II.²² These were younger sons, and the specific supply tasks they performed were necessary for the village and work sites.²³ We can find two lines of supply in this period: the inhabitants of the village, who performed easy logistical tasks as children and teenagers (group 1: bringing wood or water), and the external deliverers (group 2: fishermen, potters, laundrymen, gardeners, and smiths) whose jobs required access to water and equipment that were missing from the village. These professions were organised by scribes and connected to institutions.²⁴ The Ramesseum played a huge role among the mortuary temples due to its size and storage capacity. The supply of the workers' community with inventory from this temple is attested.²⁵

Using the village since Horemheb, and to make the processes more efficient, the composition and number of inhabitants of Deir el-Medina were transformed. The administration of Ramesses II appears to have changed the previous structure: the members of the *smd.t*-group 1 (whose jobs comprised physical tasks that could be performed by anybody with a strong constitution and knowledge of the location and work) were professionalised and excluded from the gang. They were combined with the externalised temple staff job groups (group 2, whose jobs required special knowledge, training, and experience, as well as access to material and equipment) to the *smd.t n p3 hr* or *smd.t bnr*, a special supply staff.²⁶ For geographic and economic reasons, the major construction project and permanent 'expedition' Deir el-Medina responsible for 'the King's tomb' received its own service staff, whose members at first comprised wood- and water-carriers, fishermen, gardeners, potters, confectioners, and laundrymen, coordinated by two scribes.²⁷

The establishment of the new organisation may have benefitted from the long reign of Ramesses II. The administrative structure stayed more or less constant until the time of Ramesses VI; Deir el-Medina grew into the shape commonly associated with the Ramesside period. Under Siptah, further changes took place. The short reigns of the late 19th Dynasty kings meant that gypsum making was excluded from the workers' duties and given to the service staff.²⁸ By assigning this task to *smd.t*-members, the gang was able to construct several tombs at the same time: the four sites for Seti II, Amenmesse, Siptah and Tausret/Sethnakht. None of these tombs (KV 15, 10, 47, 14) have

21. GABLER 2018a, pp. 524–525.

22. GABLER 2018a, pp. 527–531.

23. GABLER 2018c, pp. 157–189.

24. DORN 2011, pp. 38–39; GABLER 2018c, pp. 157–189.

25. ULLMANN 2002, pp. 284, 339–381.

26. At Deir el-Medina, newly needed jobs were combined with professions known since the Old Kingdom and attested in the *Satire of the Trades*; GABLER 2018a, pp. 63, 207–209.

27. The equivalent of the external staff '*smd.t bnr*' was the gang of workmen. Group 1 performed probably earlier within the community a '*smd.t hnw*', PEET 1930, p. 14; BOGOSLOVSKIY 1983, p. 294; DORN 2011, p. 38; GABLER 2018a, pp. 108, 112–113, 120, 530–531, 745, 758, figs. 2, 15.

28. GABLER 2018a, pp. 177–178, 534–535.

been finished and they are only sparsely decorated.²⁹ The task of bringing wood *'jnj-ḥt'* developed into the job of woodcutter *'š'd-ḥt'*. The growing number of inhabitants in the village and the need to extend the construction periods for larger royal tombs led the necropolis administration to transport the fuel to Thebes, where it was cut and delivered by woodcutters.³⁰

During the reign of Ramesses III, the number of workmen was raised to 60, under Ramesses IV briefly to 120.³¹ As such, more suppliers were needed, while Medinet Habu became the most important mortuary temple.³² Three generations after the introduction of the external staff, fewer sons of workers' families are identified among the deliverers. It is very likely that these sons, acting in group 1, tried to employ their children as suppliers. Demographic elements show that 10% came from a *smd.t*-family. For the majority (80%), the origins are difficult to trace, especially in the case of the title-holders of group 2, with the exception of the fishermen. They may have been related to supply- and workers' families or to inhabitants of (Western) Thebes. Group 2 professions were largely occupied along canals, agricultural areas, and institutions,³³ and were inherited within families along with knowledge and skills. These jobs were performed over a long period of time/lifetime. Within members of group 1, families consisted of different professions. They comprised woodcutters, water-carriers, gypsum-makers, and doorkeepers. Men often performed a certain task for a certain period of time and sometimes had several jobs.³⁴ The chronological arrangement of the documents relating to these men shows a repetitive pattern: woodcutters and water-carriers performed physically heavy duties first, while older men performed tasks requiring less strength but more experience, for example gypsum makers, doorkeepers or occasionally guardians. The short attestation periods for these jobs can be explained by changes in tasks and even titles. The pattern accords with the social structure amongst the carriers and the number of available positions within the jobs: more woodcutters and water-carriers were needed because of the increased quantities of water and wood required, while only two posts for gypsum-makers and four for doorkeepers were probably available. These figures reflect the fact that only some men reached an advanced age, when they probably needed easier jobs and had the experience and influence to perform these tasks. This promotion pattern from young wood deliverer to experienced doorkeeper seems to have developed in the 19th Dynasty and can be traced in detail in the 20th Dynasty through the many preserved texts.³⁵

At the end of the reign of Ramesses III, we meet for the last time two *smd.t* confectioners, probably a luxury from a bygone period, due to growing economic and political problems.³⁶ The short reigns of most kings did not improve the situation. At the time of Ramesses IX, a final profession was integrated into the *smd.t n p3 ḥr*. Since at least the beginning of the 19th Dynasty,

29. REEVES, WILKINSON 2001, pp. 150–156.

30. GABLER 2018a, pp. 71–74, 535.

31. GABLER 2018a, p. 540.

32. ULLMANN 2002, p. 521.

33. GABLER 2018a, pp. 462–465, 506–514, 538, 754, fig. 11.

34. GABLER 2018a, pp. 466–488, figs. 4, 5.

35. GABLER 2018a, fig. 14; GABLER 2018c, pp. 170–171. This pattern reflects the oldest known retirement system.

36. ČERNÝ 2001, p. 190; GABLER 2018a, pp. 347–353, 537.

smiths were responsible for renewing the many chisels needed for tomb construction. But they were temple staff: their integration into the *smd.t* of Deir el-Medina may have occurred because of the difficult context of official decision-making at the time.³⁷

Attacks by various groups often interrupted work at the Theban necropolis. More and more restrictions broke up the established processes and the dependable social structure in and around the community of workers. After the reign of Ramesses IX, the promotion pattern from *smd.t*-group 1 can no longer be traced. The village was likely abandoned in the reign of Ramesses XI. The community found a safe home around the fortified temple of Ramesses III,³⁸ where access to material and agricultural areas made some of the former supply jobs superfluous. The professions established for Deir el-Medina because of its specific geographical location at the edge of the desert and to smooth the processes at the construction sites became unnecessary next to Medinet Habu. Families could (again) perform some tasks by themselves, such as transporting fuel and water. Other tasks remained work for specialists (like potters and smiths) who could easily be contacted around the temple.³⁹ KV 4 was the last royal tomb begun in the King's Valley, but Ramesses XI was never buried there. With the abandonment of the royal necropolis, the tasks and duties of the community were no longer required and we lose track.

SUMMARY

The diachronic presentation shows that the *smd.t n pꜣ hr* developed during the reign of Ramesses II. The model for this specific *smd.t* was copied from other institutions that followed similar organisational principles. In order to be incorporated into the staff, a product or service ought to be needed regularly and in large quantities, for example basic foodstuffs or materials. Supplying the village and workplaces saved processes and compensated for the inaccessibility of the objects for the inhabitants. The *smd.t n pꜣ hr* was a flexible arrangement of different professions, whose composition, structure, number, and work rate were repeatedly changed and adjusted. There has never been a time when all its attested jobs existed simultaneously.⁴⁰ Its formation, composition, and size were highly influenced by geographical, administrative, social, political, and economic developments in the Ramesside period.⁴¹

My study offers a more complex picture of Deir el-Medina than that was previously available. A strict division between the workers' gang and the *smd.t*, as well as general statements about the New Kingdom, are seldom possible. Aspects have to be judged by period and with respect to their particular details, see fig. 1. My results are mainly based on texts, but they can be aligned with the archaeological evidence, phases of village use, workmen's huts in the royal valleys, mortuary temples, as well as correlated with the state of preservation of objects. The development in Deir el-Medina was influenced by the situation in the post-Amarna period in a unique way: for almost 250 years, the Ramesside pharaohs kept the Valley of the Kings as a royal necropolis and the responsible

37. GABLER 2018a, pp. 358–350.

38. GABLER 2018a, pp. 544–547.

39. ČERNÝ 2001, p. 190; GABLER 2018a, pp. 544–547.

40. GABLER 2018a, pp. 559–560.

41. Factors were the location of the residence, its connection with the royal necropolis, the length of a king's reign, the number of workers and the amount of tombs to be built at the same time, the location of Deir el-Medina, the use of the same sites for 250 years, safety aspects, the availability of resources, and the action scope of workers.

workers (and their families) shared their working and living space with scribes, skilled specialists, and partly with its service staff. This long period led to a textual peak under Ramesses III to VI and to the social structures that can be seen in these texts.

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Fig. 1. Organigram of Deir el-Medina.

The Visual Perception of Fatigue and Sleep in Bas-relief from the Old Kingdom to the End of the New Kingdom

SLEEP is often viewed as one of the most intimate and private activities that we carry out. Therefore, it is not surprising that the motif of a fatigued¹ or sleeping person is not common in Egyptian artwork. Compared to the written sources, the number of visual representations is considerably reduced.²

It is a challenge to identify sleeping or fatigued persons in art and to distinguish between these stages. A person lying in a bed does not necessarily have to be asleep, but the bed as a place can hint at other aspects such as procreation, birth, or death.³

There are several sign codes in modern perception, which can help to recognise whether a person is asleep or tired. In Western culture, yawning, for example, is a typical visual marker of tiredness, but in ancient Egypt, this does not seem to exist.⁴ This paper briefly examines the primary markers that visually indicate sleep or fatigue in bas-relief in ancient Egypt.

I. FATIGUE AND SLEEP IN BAS-RELIEF IN THE OLD AND MIDDLE KINGDOM

In Old and Middle Kingdom tomb scenes, specific compositions within the shepherd scenes evoke an impression of tiredness in the modern viewer.

On the one hand, these scenes are found within the cycle of the shepherds returning home from the marshes with their cattle.⁵ In these scenes, the shepherd, most likely an overseer, is sitting

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1. For a definition, see: WESTCOMBE, HAZEL 2012, pp. 226–234.

2. For a comprehensive study on fatigue and sleep in ancient Egypt, see: GERHARDS 2021 with a detailed chapter on pictorial sources.

3. HENNING 1997, p. 12.

4. See GERHARDS 2021.

5. E.g. the shepherd rests under an arbour: tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Saqqara, 5th Dyn., see MOUSSA, ALTENMÜLLER 1977, fig. 78b. The shepherd rests under an arbour and is served a drink: tomb Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Saqqara, 5th Dyn., see MOUSSA, ALTENMÜLLER 1977, fig. 78a. Mastaba of Sekhemankhptah, Saqqara, 5th/6th Dyn., now in Boston, inv. no. 04.1760, see SIMPSON 1976, fig. 4. The shepherd is served a drink in the open air: Giza, mastaba of Iasen (G 2196), 5th/6th Dyn., see SMITH 1949, p. 316, fig. 183.

on a wicker cushion and holding a staff in his hands.⁶ His head rests on his arm or knees⁷—the backrest of the basket seat functions as wind and back protection.⁸ The seat with a backrest can also be understood as a characteristic of an overseer who was entitled to an elaborate seat.⁹ The shepherd may even be seated under an arbour that protects him from the sun.¹⁰ In other sources within this scene, the resting shepherd is given something to drink,¹¹ suggesting that he is a person of higher rank.¹² Drinking is an important measure to strengthen oneself during physical work and fight the arising feeling of tiredness.¹³

On the other hand, marshland scenes in the context of mat-making and harvesting include the image of a shepherd sitting on a (basket) cushion with a staff in his hand and his head resting on his knees or arms.¹⁴

One additional source represents a squatting man under a papyrus clump with his head resting on his knees.¹⁵ Since this motif is found close to the mat-making scene, Yvonne Harpur assumes that it should also be subsumed among the pastoral scenes.¹⁶ Thus, in the Old Kingdom, the concept of fatigue as a motif is found exclusively in the context of shepherds. These scenes show a break from work, which was primarily the preserve of higher-ranking persons.

When the crocodile passage has to be overcome, a man described as the shepherds' leader is sitting on a boat on the back of a wicker chair in the same squatted body position. In contrast to the resting shepherd, however, his face is raised and the scene characterises him among other things as watchful (*nh ḥr=k* "may your face live").¹⁷

In the Middle Kingdom tomb scenes, the posture is still to be found around the shepherds, whereby the shepherd can also squat on the ground without the characteristic seat and staff.¹⁸ In tomb B1 of Senbi I, it is clearly visible that the shepherd's eyes are closed. That is represented by a slit instead of the usual eye shape, with the eyeball under the closed song highlighted by a slight bulge.¹⁹ In this case, one can assume that the resting shepherd is asleep.

6. GUTH 2018, pp. 49–50.

7. MOUSSA, ALTENMÜLLER 1977, fig. 78b.

8. BORCHARDT 1907, pp. 77–78; GUTH 2018, p. 50, n. 369.

9. GUTH 2018, pp. 49–50.

10. MOUSSA, ALTENMÜLLER 1977, fig. 78b.

11. MOUSSA, ALTENMÜLLER 1977, fig. 78a.

12. GUTH 2018, p. 50, n. 372.

13. MERZEBAN 2007, p. 228. Cf. inscription in Kanais, rock temple of Seti I, text b, where the water of a newly built well lifts a tired one, see KITCHEN 1975, p. 66.9–10.

14. E.g. resting person in the context of mat-making: (eventually) tomb of Ti, Saqqara, now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, CG 1562, see SMITH 1949, p. 315, fig. 181; WRZESZINSKI 1923, p. 397. E.g. resting person in the context of harvest: tomb (unknown), 5th Dyn., now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, CG 60072, see WRZESZINSKI 1923, p. 400.

15. Saqqara, tomb FS 3080, see HARPUR 1987, pp. 179–180, 277, no. 543; SMITH 1949, p. 315, fig. 181.

16. HARPUR 1987, pp. 179–180.

17. See e.g. DOMINICUS 1994, pp. 132–133; GUTH 2018, pp. 164–168.

18. E.g. tomb A1, Pepiankh, Meir, 12th Dyn., see BLACKMAN 1924, p. 37, pl. 14. Meir, tomb B1, Senbi I, 12th Dyn., see for a facsimile BLACKMAN 1914, pl. 10. See GERHARDS 2021 for a recent photography.

19. Concerning the eye slits, see GERHARDS 2021 with further references.

From a purely visual point, the viewer can hardly distinguish the squatted body posture from the gesture of mourning documented since the Old Kingdom.²⁰

2. FATIGUE AND SLEEP IN BAS-RELIEF IN THE NEW KINGDOM

In the New Kingdom, the crouching posture and dozing were no longer reserved exclusively for the shepherds but could also be adopted by other occupational groups. Since the 18th Dynasty, a new characteristic element in the evidence, which can be interpreted as a continuation of the scenes from the Old and Middle Kingdoms, has been the tree under whose shade a work break is taken.²¹ The tree is probably a sycamore, in which drinks and food for the breaks can be hung.²² The exhausted men take their seats either on the floor, a small portable stool, or a cushion. The context of the scene is quite different. For example, in Userhat's tomb, two men are waiting under a shady tree until it is their turn next to see the barber.²³ Their heads are propped up on their knees and partially hidden under their arms, giving the viewer the impression that they are asleep. According to Erika Meyer-Dietrich, the "sleeping" man's image represents the ideal harvest, rewrites Egypt as a land of plenty, and depicts the tiring work of a rich harvest.²⁴

Since Amenhotep III, the "exhausted charioteer" has been added as a new motif.²⁵ In a bas-relief of the tomb of Nebamun, two charioteers are shown in diverse postures. Nigel Strudwick believes that the chariots were deliberately placed one above the other to create a contrast.²⁶ On the one hand, the animals depicted differ: the upper register shows an "average" horse, whereas the lower register shows a mule.²⁷ This discrepancy is also to be seen in the depiction of the vital man controlling the

20. E.g. BADAWY 1978, fig. 56; see DOMINICUS 1994, pp. 68, 71, 75.

21. The following sources can be seen as development of the previous convention: TT 56, tomb of Userhat, 18th Dyn., Amenhotep II to Thutmose III, see BEINLICH-SEEGER, SHEDID 1987, pl. 5. TT 69, tomb of Menna, 18th Dyn., Amenhotep III, see SCHULZ, SEIDEL 2001, p. 427. Here, a second person plays the flute, as in tomb A1, Pepiankh, Meir, 12th Dyn., see BLACKMAN 1924, p. 37, pl. 14. Tomb of an unknown owner, Thebes, late 18th Dyn., now in Berlin, ÄM 18539, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 385. TT 57, Khaemhat, 18th Dyn., Amenhotep III, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 192. In TT 81 a man is crouching in an arbour, similar to the scenes from the Old Kingdom, which is why it is assumed that this person is a shepherd, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 58. A relief fragment, New York, MMA 68.16 from the 18th Dyn./Amarna period shows probably a sleeping shepherd. The man is crouching on the ground and next to him are remains of the typical arbour, see JOHNSON 2017. The shepherd's eyes are closed in a similar way as in Meir, tomb B1, Senbi I (see *supra*, n. 19). Cf. MEYER-DIETRICH 2018, p. 377, who assumes that the man is a tired doorkeeper.

22. E.g. tomb of an unknown person, Thebes, late 18th Dyn., now in Berlin, ÄM 18539, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 385.

23. BEINLICH-SEEGER, SHEDID 1987, pl. 5; WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 44.

24. MEYER-DIETRICH 2018, p. 377.

25. To be more precise: chariot officer, charioteer or an attendant, which are hard to distinguish—hereafter referred to collectively as "charioteer". E.g. tomb of Nebamun (BM EA 37982), 18th Dyn., Amenhotep III, see STRUDWICK 2006, pp. 176–177. Tomb of Kenamun, TT 162, 18th Dyn., Amenhotep III, see DAVIES 1963, pl. 18. Tomb of Horemheb, Saqqara, 18th Dyn., Tutankhamun, Berlin ÄM 20363, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 386. Tomb of Khaemhat, TT 57, 18th Dyn., Amenhotep III, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 192. Tomb of Paraemheb, TT 302, Ramesside period, see PORTER, MOSS 1970, p. 381 (I), II. Unknown tomb, probably from the Late Period, Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale/Museo Egizio, inventory no. 2606, see WRESZINKSI 1923, p. 36.

26. STRUDWICK 2003, p. 56.

27. STRUDWICK 2003, p. 55.

horse in contrast to the fatigued man surrendering to the situation.²⁸ Stephen Harvey assumes that the image of sleep or fatigue could be interpreted as an allusion to a kind of impotence or weakness.²⁹ In contrast, the horses are often depicted with highlighted sexual characteristics³⁰ and thus appear powerful and potent.³¹ In the Memphite tomb of Horemheb in Saqqara e.g., a charioteer is dozing on the back of the vehicle, leaning on his elbow.³² The topic of the “tired charioteer” is generally present in both—bas-relief and textual sources in the New Kingdom. In the satirical letter of Hori from the Ramesside period, a chariot officer, tired from work, is so deeply asleep that he does not notice that all his equipment is stolen during the night.³³

During the Amarna period, two additional visual contexts of dozing and even sleeping men appear regularly in the tomb context and on talatat blocks.

Firstly, door guards are dozing in front of their portals in the palace.³⁴ Emad el-Sayyad assumes that the motif of a tired or blind doorkeeper in the New Kingdom is not to be understood as a cynical or humorous depiction. It could have a symbolical or metaphorical meaning to enable the god Re and the deceased to easily pass through the gates of the underworld.³⁵ Erika Meyer-Dietrich sees in the tired doorkeepers somewhat the symbolic calm in the palace chambers when the royal family is not present.³⁶

A hitherto unique scene can be compared with the doorkeeper scenes from the Amarna period. It is attested in the tomb of Intef (TT 155) from the time of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III and shows a man squatting on the floor next to the door in a wine store, resting his drooping head on the palm of his hand.³⁷ The fragmentary inscription may have read that he was accused of being sleeping and drunk by the workers who joined the scene, to which he replied that he was not asleep.³⁸ His body position is very reminiscent of the sleeping doorkeepers in the palace context. That may be a deliberate analogy between drunkenness and sleep, which is also found in the term *sḏr.t*³⁹ as a sleeping or intoxicating potion.

The second new creation during the Amarna period concerns two kinds of representations of sleeping men who are depicted in a reclining body position in contrast to the previous ones. These motifs are found exclusively on the palace’s talatat blocks, but not on the reliefs of the tombs. According to E. Meyer-Dietrich, they represent night scenes.⁴⁰ The men are either lying on a mat

28. STRUDWICK 2003, p. 56, n. 65.

29. These ideas were brought to the attention of the author in a personal conversation with S. Harvey after the lecture held at the ICE XII. He already presented his thought in a lecture on “The Sleeping Charioteer: Observations on Equine Representations in Egyptian Art” in 2001.

30. SABBAYH 2018, p. 141, fig. V.II.

31. See *supra*, n. 29.

32. MARTIN 1989, p. 38, pl. 28–29; SABBAYH 2018, p. 140.

33. pAnastasi I, pBM EA 10247, 19.7–20.5, see FISCHER-ELFERT 1992, pp. 126–130.

34. They can squat on the ground or a cushion, or lean against the door. See GERHARDS 2021 for references and literature.

35. EL-SAYYAD 2014, p. 127.

36. MEYER-DIETRICH 2018, pp. 374–375.

37. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1957, pp. 17–18, pl. 15. See for a recent image GERHARDS 2021.


38. See *supra*, n. 37.

39. ERMAN, GRAPOW 1955, p. 393.6. See GERHARDS 2021 for that topic.

40. MEYER-DIETRICH 2018, p. 378.

or a bed. Some are further sleeping on a headrest, a pillow, or their hands as a substitute pillow. In all of the images, the men lying asleep are wrapped in a thick, transparent bedspread, allowing the legs to be seen. The legs may be drawn up towards the body, giving the impression of a more lateral sleeping position. There are two documented contexts in which this motif appears: 1. soldiers sleeping in the open air by a blazing fireplace⁴¹, and 2. guards sleeping in the palace⁴².

SUMMARY

Fatigue can be represented in the tomb scenes and on talatat blocks by a squatting body position and the head resting on the knees during a rest. The characteristic of squatting is the folded posture of the arms and the head lowered downwards. That is an apparent discrepancy between the prototypical classifier for the domain [Fatigue] (Gardiner sign A7 ) , which shows a man squatting on the ground but stretching his arms away from his body. Another discrepancy is evident between inscription and depiction: even though an inscription identifies a worker as exhausted from his work, he is shown upright.⁴³ On the other hand, the men's condition crouching on the ground is not mentioned or explained in the inscriptions.⁴⁴

The squatting body position is the typical representation of a nap during the day. Soldiers and guards who are sleeping in a reclining position at the fireplace or the palace represent night scenes. Here, a transparent blanket serves as a characteristic feature. Also, one can assume that a slit in the eye indicates a closed eye while asleep.

Professions associated with fatigue or sleep are therefore shepherds, chariot officers/charioteers/attendants, doorkeepers, soldiers, and palace guards.

41. Boston, MFA 67.921; New York, MMA 1991.240.11; New York, Brooklyn Museum 64.148.3. MEYER-DIETRICH 2018, pp. 310–311 assumes that the soldiers were of Nubian origin. Cf. KITCHEN 1982, p. 18.9 (Medjai sleep peacefully until awakened by sunlight).

42. Berlin, ÄM 20488; see SCHÄFER 1963, p. 130, figs. 89, 215, 253 (It could also be a campfire scene, cf. New York, Brooklyn Museum 64.148.3). Egyptian Museum in Cairo, JE 65950, see PENDLEBURY 1951, p. 67, no. 35/228. For an object possibly located in Cairo, see ROEDER 1969 pl. 208 (PC 270). See in general, ROEDER 1969, p. 302 (chap. VI O 7h).

43. E.g. KANAWATI, ABDER-RAZIQ 2000, p. 49, pl. 31, 61.

44. An exception is the above-mentioned scene in the tomb of Intef TT 155.

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