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Author(s): Jac. J. Janssen

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ABSENCE FROM WORK
BY THE NECROPOLIS WORKMEN OF THEBES

von

Jac. J. J a n s s e n

*Prof. Wolfgang Helck zum
65. Geburtstag gewidmet.*

In accordance with the trend in modern historiography to pay attention to the ordinary people rather than to those in power, provided that the vicissitudes of the common man described may be supposed to a certain extent to exemplify their time, Egyptology too shows a tendency to study subjects which, although perhaps trivial in themselves, illustrate the everyday life of the Pharaonic Period. This may serve as my defence for presenting here a study about such a seemingly unimportant matter as the reasons why particular workmen did not appear at the workshop in the royal tomb on specific days.

The point of departure is o.BM 5634, one of the largest texts we possess among the thousands of ostraca recording the events in the settlement of Deir el-Medīna. A facsimile of it had already been published as early as the year 1864¹, when knowledge of the type of hieratic script

¹ Inscriptions in Hieratic and Demotic Characters from the Collections of the British Museum, London 1868, pl. 20-21. The object is stated to be a flake of limestone (p. 8), but its measurements are not given.

used on the ostraca of the XIXth and XXth Dynasties was still rather limited. Nevertheless, references to the text occur in some older Egyptological works². Since Černý and Gardiner published a hieroglyphic transcription in their "Hieratic Ostraca"³ the text has been available to every Egyptologist.

The ostrakon is inscribed on both sides. One side begins with a date, namely "Year 40", which, on account of the names that follow, cannot be anything else but the year 40 of Ramesses II. Although there is no intrinsic reason to call one side the "recto" and the other the "verso" I will follow Černý-Gardiner here and treat the side with the date as the recto.

The ostrakon bears a list of forty names, in all except two instances followed by a series of dates, written in black. Above the majority of the dates there are one or more words written in red, indicating the reason why the man was not present at his work on that particular day. That this is indeed what was meant by the red entries appears from the frequent occurrence of the word *mr*, "ill", although other entries too can hardly be explained in any other way. The text thus contains a list of the dates of absence from work in the year 40 of Ramesses II, and, though its provenance is unknown, it is obvious from the names that it comes from the community of necropolis workmen at Thebes.

As mentioned above, to only two of the names have no dates been appended; they are Nebamete (rto 8) and Maanakhtef (rto 18)⁴. One name, Nakhy, looks as if it was added as an afterthought in the blank space behind the short line rto 9. Below it will become apparent that the dates added to this name confirm the supposition of afterthought. In some instances the space on one line was too small for all entries. In that case the scribe used the blank space behind other lines for the continuation of his notes. Thus lines rto 7a and b belong to Siwadjy, who occupies rto 4; rto 5b (behind rto 8) to Haremwia (rto 5); rto 20a

² Cf. Černý-Gardiner (see next note), p. 23.

³ Jaroslav Černý and Alan H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca*, Oxford 1957, pl. 83-84. Since the possibility that one could improve their readings appears to be very small, I venture to use the transcriptions without having studied the original.

⁴ Černý-Gardiner numbered the black lines only, conceiving the red entries to be additions. Since this is in accordance with the contents of the text and makes quoting easier I follow the practice.

(behind rto 15) to Neferronpe (rto 20), the name that is lost in line 20 being preserved here. No such additions are found on the verso, except that the scribe apparently deemed the space at the bottom unsuitable for the continuation of the entries of Nakhtamūn and added vso 22 behind vso 15-16.

In general, therefore, the verso is better composed than the recto. Still, it appears that the scribe arranged the names on both sides in a preconceived order, for the name with the longest series of dates is put last on both sides. The procedure the scribe followed may have been this: at a certain moment during the year, probably getting towards the end, he noted on the large piece of limestone the names of all workmen of that year⁵, leaving between the lines sufficient room for adding the red entries. He then filled in behind each name the days on which the workman had been absent (in black) and above each date the reason for it (in red). He drew the data from day-to-day notes made by the professional scribe of the gang⁶. As examples of such preliminary notes I refer to the series of ostraca oCairo 25779-'785 (dating from the reigns of Sethōs II and/or Amenmesse), which record the absentees day-by-day, in many instances with an indication as to the reason for the absence.

In the ostraca from the XXth Dynasty (e.g., oTurin 57007.57026.57028-'0347) reasons for the absence of particular workmen are seldom recorded. Not all texts belonging to the so-called "Journal of the Necropolis" are of the same type, each period (or scribe) evidently following its (his) own habits. The rather complete series from the last years of Ramesses III and the first ones of Ramesses IV (i.a., oDeM 32-47 and 153-164) mentions, apart from deliveries to the gang of food, fuel

⁵ This may mean that Nakhy became a member of the gang in the course of the year.

⁶ For the duties of the scribe of the necropolis, see Jaroslav Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*, Le Caire 1973, 226, where a few instances of the final records, written on papyrus, are also mentioned (note 6). I am inclined to add to them the fragmentary papyrus Turin 1949+1946, published by Černý himself (in: *ZĀS* 72, 1936, 110 f.). This papyrus contains indications about work not found on oDeM 39 that records day-by-day notes of the same period, which means that other texts have also been consulted for its composition.

⁷ Jesús López, *Ostraca ieratici*. N. 57001-57092, Milano 1978 = *Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino. Serie seconda - Collezioni*. Vol. II, fasc. 1.

and suchlike, only matters of more general importance such as visits of viziers and other high officials, processions, strikes, the death and burial of the Pharaoh, etc.⁸. It may be that during this period separate registers of absentees were kept, but only a few traces seem to have been preserved⁹.

The ostraca from the later reigns of the XIXth Dynasty (e.g., oCairo 25512 and 25515-'521) also mainly list, except for outstanding events, the work of the gang as a whole, though some notes explaining individual absences do occur. Hence it is particularly the type of records from the time of Sethōs II and/or Amenmesse referred to above that provide us with the data from which the scribe of oBM 5634 composed his text.

Since in the following I have to refer throughout to the names mentioned in the text, and that quoting the lines of recto and verso plus the names as well would be rather awkward, I will indicate each workman by a number. It may seem that individuals are depersonalized by this method, but, on the other hand, it is in accordance with modern practice in many factories and other large bodies of workers. Nos. [1] to [18] occur on the recto, [19] to [37] on the verso; the two names without notes are skipped, while Nakhy, added afterwards in rto 9a, receives no. [38]. The numbers correspond with the following names¹⁰:

rto 2	Pendwau	[1]	vso 1	Ḥuynūfe ^{a)}	[19]
3	Ḥarnūfe	[2]	2	Amenemwia	[20]
4	Siwadjy	[3]	3	Anherkhē'	[21]
5	Ḥaremwia	[4]	4	Nefer'obe	[22]
6	Amennakhte	[5]	5	Psiūr	[23]
7	Wadjmose	[6]	6	Pkhoir	[24]
9	Ḥahnekh	[7]	7	Sībe	[25]
10	Nakhtmin	[8]	8	Nefersēne	[26]
11	Pennūb	[9]	9	Simūt	[27]
12	'Apahte	[10]	10	Khons	[28]
13	Kha'emtōre	[11]	11	Iny	[29]
14	Amenmose	[12]	12	Sunero ^{b)}	[30]
15	Any	[13]	13	Nebenma'e	[31]
16	Wennofre	[14]	14	Merwēse	[32]
17	Bukentef	[15]	15	Ra'mose	[33]
19	Ḥuy	[16]	16	Beknmūt	[34]
20	Neferronpe	[17]	17	Ra'hotpe	[35]
21	Pehripīdje	[18]	18	Iyernēf	[36]
			19	Nakhtamūn	[37]

a) Note the determinative after *Ḥuy* (abbreviation of *Amenḥotpe*), which is rarely written.

b) Or *Sul*?

The list contains only names of workmen and not of their foremen nor that of the scribe of the gang. In the year 40 of *Ramesses II* the foremen were *Neferhotpe* for the right¹¹ and *Kaha* for the left 'side'¹². The name of the scribe of the necropolis, *Kenḥikhopshef*¹³ - who according to Černý did not write the text himself¹⁴ - occurs once (vso 11) in a red entry; elsewhere he is called "the scribe", just as the foremen are indicated throughout by the word *ḥry* (see below). That absences of the three superiors were noted down appears, for instance, from oCairo 25779-'784. Why they should be missing here is obscure.

The deputies were also omitted, unless they are listed under their names without mention of their function. Černý has suggested¹⁵ that in the second part of the reign of *Ramesses II* Any, the son of the foreman *Kaha*, acted as deputy, but nothing in our text, in which he occurs as no. [13], indicates that he had already been appointed in year 40. On the contrary, the fact that Any was once absent because he had to carry stones for the scribe does not suggest that he then occupied an office. His colleague, *Amenemwia*¹⁶, occurs as no. [20], and for him too nothing points to a pre-eminent position among the workmen.

That Any, who was in future to be the deputy of the left 'side', occurs on the recto and his colleague *Amenemwia* on the verso may be seen as an indication that the distribution of the names over the two sides

⁸ An exception is the note in oDeM 166, 2: "*Ḥay fed a (cow?)*". This ostrakon belongs to the period mentioned, as does oDeM 36 (year 31 of *Ramesses III*), where we read (rto 1-2) that 'scribe' *Nekhemmut* quarrelled with his men (cf. Černý, *Workmen*, 213).

⁹ E.g. oDeM 634, where the names of absentees are enumerated, followed in col. II by the indication *ḥry.f.*, in one instance by *p3 sš* (for this type of note, see below). Another example may be oTurin 57039, in which some names are followed by *mr.* Complete lists of all workmen are oDeM 236 and oGardiner 14 (= Hier. Ostr. 25, 1). The latter begins by mentioning absences (rto 1 and 2), followed by the record: "working in that place", while oDeM 236 states that the (entire?) gang was "in that place". The frequent expression *m st tn* means "at the workshop", which may be the royal tomb or a tomb in the Valley of the Queens; it looks to be an abbreviation of *b3kw m st tn*.

¹⁰ For the vocalization I mainly follow the practice of Černý in his "Workmen".

¹¹ That he was already foreman in year 40 appears from oDeM 126; see below, note 52. Cf. also Bierbrier, in: *JSSEA* 8, 1977-78, 35.

¹² Cf. Černý, *Workmen*, 125 and 293 ff.

¹³ Cf. op.cit., 329-337.

¹⁴ Op.cit., 248. See also p. 332.

¹⁵ Op.cit., 135.

¹⁶ Loc.cit.

of the ostrakon is connected with the division of the workmen into two 'sides'. I am unable to prove this, since from the middle of the reign of Ramesses II very few texts have been preserved and in not one of these the distribution of the men over the 'sides' is indicated. That a Ḥarnūfe [2] and a Ḥaremwia [4] occur at the end of the Dynasty on the right 'side', whereas in our text they are listed on the recto together with Any, the later deputy of the left 'side', does not make the suggestion very likely. In this connection I may remark that Černý's statement¹⁷ that Any "would belong naturally to the 'side' of his father" is not as self-evident as he thought. The other son of the foreman Kaḥa, Anherkhē', appears in this text as no. [21] on the verso, so that at least one of the sons may not belong to his father's 'side'¹⁸. Whatever this may be, the principle of the distribution of names over both sides of the ostrakon remains obscure.

Turning to the contents of the text, the best way to study them is first to tabulate all days recorded as days of absence. One immediately recognizes significant facts.

Firstly, as Helck already remarked in his study on festival days of the gang¹⁹, there are many days on which not a single person is marked absent. This does not mean that all had been at work, but, at least in most instances, that nobody worked at all. Individual absence is only recorded for a working day, not for a free day. From the table it is evident that the 'weekend', that is, the last two days of a decade, was always free, and in most instances the first day of the next decade also. Absences are recorded only on III 3ḥt 21 and III ʃmw 21, never on a first or eleventh day of a month, nor on the other twenty-firsts.

Further, it is clear that not all months of the year 40 are covered. The dates start at the earliest with the third decade of III 3ḥt, and with a few exceptions end in the third decade of IV ʃmw. It does not surprise us that the Epagomenal Days are not mentioned, since they may have been festival days²⁰, but I 3ḥt and II 3ḥt at the beginning of

¹⁷ Loc.cit.

¹⁸ Pehripīdje [18] and Sībe [25], two brothers (Černý, Workmen, 291-292), also do not occur on the same side of the ostrakon.

¹⁹ Feiertage und Arbeitstage in der Ramessidenzeit, in: JESHO 7, 1964, 140.

²⁰ Not always, as pTurin 2070/133+134 (+3 fragments) proves; cf. Shafik Allam, Hieratische Ostraka und Papyri, Tübingen 1973, Tafelteil, pl. 120. According to oCairo 25788, 4-5, "They (i.e., the workmen) were in the village" on the third Epagomenal Day.

the year are also missing completely. True, there is a small group of connected entries for I *3ḥt* 14 and 15, but they occur at the end of the series for most men²¹, after IV *šmw*, while the entries for the same days for Nakhy [38] appear, as stated above, to have been written as an afterthought. Hence, very probably the month I *3ḥt* belongs to the next year of the calendar. Helck has suggested that the day of the accession to the throne of Ramesses II is III *šmw* 27²². If that is correct the text in any case spans two regnal years. Whether the superscribed "year 40" belongs to the earlier or the later days that are recorded is uncertain. If the procedure that I suggested above has indeed been followed (see p. 129 f.) it may be that the date refers to the year of the composition of the list and that this took place after III *šmw*, that is, that the majority of the entries actually refer to the regnal year 39.

The third conclusion we can draw from the table is that several decades are missing entirely. They are: III *3ḥt* (a) and (b)²³; IV *3ḥt* (c); I *pṛt* (a); III *pṛt* (a) and (b)²⁴; IV *pṛt* (b); I *šmw* (a); II *šmw* (c) and IV *šmw* (b). The omission of the two first, III *3ḥt* (a) and (b), may be due to the fact that the text actually covers only the period from III *3ḥt* 21 onwards, but such an explanation is not possible for the other blank spaces in the table.

Had no workman been ill or absent for other reasons during these decades or did the entire gang stop working for those periods? There are indications that indeed the periods skipped may have been free for everybody. On III *3ḥt* 21-24 two persons, [10] and [17], are stated to be ill, the former probably seriously since [9], possibly a friend or a close relative, and the doctor [18] are said to have been with him. On the first days recorded after III *3ḥt* 24, namely IV *3ḥt* 7 and 8, both [10] and [17] still appear to be ill, and the doctor is still with the former. This is also the case on the 15th to the 17th of that month, although [17] seems to have recovered. It looks fairly certain,

²¹ Not for [1] of whom only one day is recorded.

²² Helck, in: *Analecta Biblica* 12, 1959, 120. See also Krauß, in: *SAK* 5, 1977, 147-148. I agree with Krauß that Larson's argument (in: *Serapis* 3, 1975-1976, 17-21) is not correct.

²³ With (a), (b) and (c) the decades of the month are indicated.

²⁴ In III *pṛt* (a) only one entry, for no. [20], which, as we will see, may be a mistake. That may also be the case with the only date in III *pṛt* (b) for no. [5].

therefore, that the periods between III *3ḥt* 24 and IV *3ḥt* 7 and between IV *3ḥt* 8 and 15 were omitted, not because the two men were present at the work, but because the entire gang was free.

Whether this is also the explanation for other blank decades in the table is not certain. On I *šmw* 16-17 no. [37] was absent because of an eye-disease, while on the 25th to 27th he is reported to be ill²⁵. No entry for any person occurs for the days between I *šmw* 17 and 25. Does this mean that it was the same illness of [37] in both entries, and that nobody worked on those intervening days? A curious case is presented by the entries for [19], who is stated to be absent because of an eye-disease on III *šmw* 3,5,7 and 8. The omission of day 4 may be a simple error²⁶, but the 6th is also skipped in the case of [32]; obviously it was a free day for everybody. The same may hold true for I *prt* 16; see the series of [10].

All this means that very probably of the 280 days covered by the list (III *3ḥt* 21 to IV *šmw* 30) no more than 70²⁷ were working days; or, taking the decades mentioned in the text, in only 18 out of the 28 people worked at least on some days. This seems at first sight rather too much to believe, and one would be inclined to ascribe it to the well-known inaccuracy of the Egyptian scribe. However, from ostraca from the reign of Sethōs II we know that free time could amount to half or even more of the total period covered by an account²⁸. The workmen were never driven hard. We must also bear in mind that by the fortieth year of Ramesses II the royal tomb would have been in an advanced state of preparedness, if not already completely ready for the burial. In this connection Černý has noticed that the strength of the gang gradually decreased during Ramesses' reign²⁹, work having been transferred to the tombs of the royal family in the Valley of the Queens. If, during the short reign of Sethōs II whose tomb (K 15) never had been finished, half the time of the workmen was free, it is not improbable that during the fortieth year of Ramesses II they merely did work one out of every four days.

²⁵ What the red stroke through I *šmw* means I do not know. Was it cancelled because it was superfluous?

²⁶ There are more errors of this kind. For example, on IV *3ḥt* 15-17 the doctor is said to be with [10], but [10] himself is not recorded as being ill on the 17th. For the probability that no. [20] is wrongly recorded absent on III *prt* 6, see below, p. 139.

²⁷ Omitting the doubtful data mentioned in note 24.



²⁸ See OMRO 58, 1977, 231.

²⁹ Černý, Workmen, 105-106.

Whether this means an abundance of leisure in our eyes is not relevant; the question is whether it was a luxury in the eyes of the workmen's contemporaries. Unfortunately, there is not the slightest evidence for the amount of free time enjoyed by an average Egyptian cultivator. Comparison with modern conditions may be completely wrong. Non-industrial societies in general show a tendency to under-use of labour³⁰. On the other hand, a "free day" does not mean that the workmen were absolutely idle. We know that they earned their - well-buttered - bread besides their regular work in the royal tomb by manufacturing wooden objects and painting tomb furniture for people outside the village³¹.

We now come to the reasons noted for the absence of the workmen which, written in red above the lines, accompany most dates. In a few instances one note covers two consecutive days, but usually when absence for the same reason lasted for more than one day, the scribe wrote the reason above the first date and above those following either *m mitt* or the abbreviation **—Z**, meaning "ditto".

It is appropriate to note with regard to the following that not every entry is legible. Particularly at the end of the lines on the recto some words are partly or wholly lost, and also at the bottom of the verso³². Those entries of which the meaning is evident or can be guessed with a reasonable degree of certainty are included in the discussion; the others are set aside. They are too few in number to influence the conclusions.

By far the most frequently recorded reason for absence is illness, written  or . It occurs nearly a hundred times. Above I have pointed out that the apparently quite serious illness of [10] lasted at least from III *3ht* 21 to I *prt* 17. Illness of long duration was of course not exceptional. In oCairo 25785 we read that Merysakhme was ill on IV *3ht* 7 and 8. The days 9 and 10 are not recorded, being the 'weekend'. On the 11th, 12th and 13th he went up to the Valley of the Kings (called *sht*) but was unable to do any work (rto 4-5: *bw šm[f]* *r p3 b3k*; rto 7-8 and 9: *bw rh.f b3kw*), while on days 14-18 and 21-23

³⁰ Cf., e.g., M. Sahlin, *Stone Age Economies*, Chicago 1972, ch. 2.

³¹ See, e.g., pDeM III and IX.

³² From the transcription and the facsimile it is evident that the top of the recto and the bottom of the verso are back to back.

(19-20, another 'weekend', is not recorded) he stayed "in the village" (*m p3 dmi*). On the 24th for the first time he went to the workshop again (*iw r p3 b3kw*). This means that he was absent at least from the 7th to the 23rd, that is, 17 days; unless he had already been ill some time before IV 3^{ht} 7, which had then been recorded on another ostrakon.

The matter seems quite unimportant, a normal human incident. It is here related in connection with the illness of [10], firstly in order to demonstrate that the daily life of an individual necropolis workman of the thirteenth century B.C. can be traced from these sources; but also, since it once more shows that the workmen were not hard pressed. Like workers in a modern Welfare State, they could stay home when they were too ill to work and were attended by a doctor. Even a friend such as no. [9] could take a few days off to look after them. Or, as in Merysakhme's case, one could have been able to walk over the ridge into the Valley of the Kings but, feeling too weak to work, abstain and go home again for a few days. The workmen were certainly not treated like slaves!

In only two instances is the kind of illness stated: nos. [19] and [37] each did not attend to work for a few days³³ because of eyes troubles (*šn i^{rt}.f*). Diseases of the eyes have always been common in Egypt³⁴. Their occurrence in Deir el-Medīna is attested by stelae on which a workman expresses his thanks to the god for the preservation or recovery of his sight³⁵. I do not know of any other reference to eye disease in an ostrakon, the nature of the illnesses seldom being specified. Once, however, it is stated of a person that his hand and, in the next entry, that another person's feet were hurting³⁶. In another text one finds the notice *mr m di^t t3 wbd^t*, which may mean that the man got burned³⁷.

An accident that was fairly common and occurs several times in other ostraca, although only once in oBM 5634 (with [25]), is to be stung by a scorpion. It is here expressed by the words *psh sw t3 wh^t*, "the scorpion stung him"³⁸; in other instances one finds *psh n wh^t*³⁹, or *psh*

³³ In the case of [19] they are III *šmw* 3, 5, 7, 8. For the skipping of days 4 and 6, see above, p. 134.

³⁴ For this subject, see LÄ I, cols. 560-562. For blindness conceived of as punishment by the gods, see Kuentz, Actes XXIIe Congrès des Orientalistes, Paris 1949, 89 and de Meulenaere, in: CdE XXVIII, No. 56, 1953, 255-257.

³⁵ Cf. e.g., Gunn, The Religion of the Poor in Ancient Egypt, in: JEA 3, 1916, 81-94. See also stela Turin 50052 (Tosi-Roccati, 283), on which the dedicator Pay had drawn four ears (this occurs frequently) and four eyes; the text alludes to loss of sight.

³⁶ oCairo 25532, 2 and 3; in oGardiner 37 (= Hier. Ostr. 26,3), 7, one man is recorded ill because of his ear, another because of his arm (also in the next line).

*sw*⁴⁰, or even only *psht*⁴¹.

Except for the doctor only one man is reported to have been absent because another person was ill. Not only was [10] attended by [9], as related above; on IV *prt* 24 and 25 [9] was absent because "his mother was ill". It would seem unwarranted to conclude from the fact that the same man was recorded twice for this reason, and no-one anywhere else in the text was, that he was a particularly kind person. He may also have been a sort of male nurse, assisting the doctor; but the twofold mention of absence for the sake of others may be accidental too.

As said above no. [18] was the doctor. He was certainly one of the workman, his activities as physician being a part-time job for which he received a small extra payment⁴². Our text records that he was once "with" [10] for a few days; on another occasion "with" [28] "making a medicine"⁴³, and on yet a third occasion "with" [4]⁴⁴. One date in the series, III *šmw* 3, is accompanied by the phrase "making medicine" only; the text mentions for that day the eye troubles of [19], but whether the medicine was for this workman is not certain. The fourth time the doctor took action was in order to make up a medicine for the wife of the scribe, which took him no less than fourteen days (I *šmw* 25 - II *šmw* 8), at least, if he continued with it during the 'weekend', and possibly even longer since the days before the 25th are not recorded. He certainly needed so much time because of the rare ingredients that according to magico-medical texts were used in some medicines. It may be that he also visited the patient daily, staying with her for some time, so that he was excused from not turning up at the workshop in the royal tomb⁴⁵.

³⁷ oCairo 25787, 2.

³⁸ Also oCairo 25519, vso 6 and 7.

³⁹ oCairo 25517, vso 13; 25521, vso 2 and 3.

⁴⁰ oCairo 25779, vso 14.

⁴¹ oCairo 25517, vso 19, where it is followed by the significant words *iw.f mr*, "and he fell ill". In oCairo 25713, 4 we read: "He (Amenhotpe) was stung in the house of Nebsmen during the night".

⁴² See, e.g., oCairo 25608, 10; oDeM. 149, 7; 376, 9. For a doctor's fee, see pTurin 1880, vso 5,2 ff. (= RAD 47 f.).

⁴³ On III *prt* 25-27. No. [28] is indeed reported ill on these days, as well as on the 28th.

⁴⁴ On III *šmw* 17-22, during which time [4] is reported ill.

⁴⁵ For days of absence of another doctor in the village, Pay'anu, see oDeM 617.

In four entries the word *sš* (𐎓𐎗) occurs followed by an indication of a member of the family. *sš* means either "to spread out, to stretch"⁴⁶, or "to pass (= *sn*)"⁴⁷. It looks possible that the latter verb is used here, indicating that the member of the family "passed away"⁴⁸. However, when comparing the dates a problem arises. The entries are:

[7]	II <i>šmw</i> 7-8:	<i>sš mwt.f</i>
[15]	II <i>šmw</i> 6 and 8:	<i>sš mwt.f</i>
[35]	II <i>šmw</i> 5-8:	<i>sš s3.f</i>
[20]	III <i>pṛt</i> 6:	<i>sš sn(t).f</i>

In the first three entries the date is the same or about the same. Perhaps one has to emend day 6 and 8 to 7 and 8 for [15], for it looks as if the mother of Ḥahnekh [7] and of Bukentef [15] was one and the same woman; although, even if that is the case the emendation is not absolutely necessary. It may also be that *mwt* means in one or in both instances "mother-in-law"⁴⁹. That two mothers died on that particular day seems improbable. But it would be even more unlikely that on the same day the son of [35] died too. Three different persons on a single day, and only one at another time during the seventy days recorded would be too accidental. Therefore, I would suggest that *s3.f* is an error for *s3t.f*, the mother (or mother-in-law) of [7] and [15] being also the daughter of [35]. Even the fourth entry may be incorrect, since it is the only one in this decade. Could it be a mistake for II *šmw* 6⁵⁰?

If we reject as improbable the death of two (or three) different persons on one single day and of a third (fourth) on a day in a decade which for the rest is completely blank in the table, there are two alternatives: either these entries all refer to the same person, or the interpretation of *sš* as "to pass away" is wrong. It may then perhaps refer to a ritual of some unknown kind performed for people,

⁴⁶ Wb III, 482, 16 ff.

⁴⁷ Wb III 483, 2.

⁴⁸ I do not know of any other use of this verb in the same sense, but cf. the word *sšyw*, "the departed" (Wb III, 456, 14) in the sense of "the deceased".

⁴⁹ According to Bierbrier, *The Late New Kingdom, Warminster 1975*, 24, the mother of Ḥahnekh (II) was Makhy (I). In the genealogy no Bukentef occurs.

⁵⁰ If altered to II *šmw* the place of the entry within the series for [20] remains correct. For a similar emendation, see note 96.

very probably deceased, by their brothers, fathers, and sons(-in-law) on specific days. Such a suggestion appears less likely, so that we have to conclude that the scribe made the following mistakes:

- [15] II *šmw* 6 and 8, for 7 - 8 (or 6 - 8?)
 [20] III *pṛt* 6, for II *šmw* 6
 [35] * *s3.f*, for *s3t.f*

I quite well realize that this looks like stretching the point too much, although the slovenliness of Egyptian scribes seems to have known no bounds. If the suggestion is correct, it may be a warning that other data in this text may contain errors which we are unable to detect. On the other hand, the corrections here suggested do not influence the value of the record for calculating the number of days a particular workman has been absent, which may have been of importance for his wages or suchlike.

A similar event is mentioned in the case of [20], and also for [22]. On I *pṛt* 15 the former is recorded as having been absent *hr wt Hr-msw*, on II *šmw* 7 the latter (*hr*) *wt sn.f*. Černý refers to the first entry in his "Workmen"⁵¹, pointing out that the death of Harmose is mentioned in oDeM 126⁵². This ostrakon has recently been discussed by Green⁵³. It records that the scribe Pyay and the "child of the necropolis" Ma'hy reported to the foreman Neferhotpe and workman Pennūb (our no. [9]) that Harmose had died in the house of a Haremhab.

Černý translated the words *hr wt* in oBM 5634 as "mummifying", but I would prefer the rendering "wrapping up" (the body)⁵⁴. Mummifying suggests a process taking some weeks, whereas in both instances only one free day is recorded for the *wt*. It may even be that by this verb the burial is also meant, for, in the present text, the word *krs* does not occur - except in the phrase *kṛst p3 ntr* (see below) - whereas in other ostraca several mentions of burials are found⁵⁵.

⁵¹ 119, note 1.

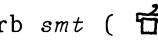
⁵² The ostrakon, therefore, dates also from the year 40 (or 39?). It was from this text that I concluded above (p.131) that Neferhotpe was already foreman that year.

⁵³ in: Or 45, 1976, 395-409.

⁵⁴ The word is both times determined by the striking man (sign A 24). In the unpublished oTurin 9619 *wt*, "coffin", determined by the wood sign, occurs also in a list of absences. Since the preceding words are missing we cannot establish the exact context, but evidently a person is put "within his coffin", mentioned as reason for absence.

oCairo 25554 is particularly significant in this respect. It relates that in a year 6, on II *3ht* 15, a woman called Thenuy died, and that she was buried on the 17th. The speed would seem to be appropriate for the Egyptian climate, but hardly leaves time for an actual mummification process as it is usually understood. One may ask whether indeed the bodies of the workmen and their families were subjected to such an elaborate mummification, or whether preservation techniques were usually quite simple in the village, taking no more time than one day. In that case *wt*, "wrapping up (the body)", could immediately be followed by the burial (*krst*), and the death of Harmose, reported in oDeM 126, could have taken place one day before his "wrapping up" for which [20] was absent on I *prt* 15. We do not know enough about burial practices in Deir el-Medīna to decide whether such a short process was usual or not⁵⁶.

Which brother of Nefer'obe was "wrapped up" by him on II *šmw* 7 is unknown. He was himself a son of Neferronpe [17] and the owner of tomb no. 5⁵⁷. According to its inscriptions he had more than one brother. However, *sn* may also indicate a brother-in-law or a cousin, even perhaps merely a member of the same generation - who were, after all, nearly always cousins in the village.

A custom connected with the dead is recorded for [33]. On II *šmw* 2 he is said to *smt n s3.f*. The verb *smt* () occurs already in the Middle Kingdom⁵⁸ and may be connected with *sm3*, "scalp"⁵⁹. It

⁵⁵ E.g., oCairo 25506, vso 3; 25510, 4; 25783, 26; 25784, 3. In oVarille 26, 8-9 (unpubl.), of a year 2, very probably of Amenmesse, we read that the gang did not work "in order to bury Sennofre" (a woman).


⁵⁶ In oCairo 25746 we find mention of one action at the moment of someone's death, for it records: "The people who went to *Dsrt* (Deir el-Bahri) when Nofre (a woman) had died", namely four men (or, if continued on the verso, six men, Pneb being mentioned twice). Although it is not explicitly stated, there seems to be a connection between the death and the going to Deir el-Bahri.



⁵⁷ Published by Jacques Vandier, *La tombe de Nefer-abou*, MIFAO 69, Le Caire 1935. The genealogy on p. 55-56 does not take into account the vagueness of the indications of family relations. Tese, for instance, is Nefer'obe's wife, hence not a daughter but a daughter-in-law of Neferronpe, and Amenmose was the husband of Tentahy and hence the father-in-law of Nefer'obe. For the latter, see also stela Turin 50058 (Tosi-Roccati, 95).

⁵⁸ pLeningrad 1116 B (Prophecy of Neferty), 42.

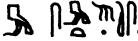
⁵⁹ Wb IV, 122.

indicates the loosened hair of a mourner and from that took on the meaning "to mourn". In this sense it occurs three times in oDeM 389 (lines 2,3 and 6)⁶⁰ as an explanation for the absence of a workman⁶¹. The matter in the text under discussion is clear: on II *šmw* 2 no. [33] mourned for his son, on the next day he is reported to be ill. What we do not know is why he mourned on this particular day; perhaps it was the anniversary of his son's death, or the death had occurred recently.




The last type of note connected with disease and death occurs fairly frequently. At ten places in the text we find the sign , preceded by either *hmt.f*, "his wife", or *s3t.f*, "his daughter". A daughter is mentioned with [3] on IV *prt* 16; [6] on IV *prt* 23; [22] on IV *3ht* 15; [35] on IV *prt* 25; a wife with [8] on III *prt* 27; [21] on IV *3ht* 17; [22] on IV *šmw* 26; [25] on IV *prt* 8; [27] on I *prt* 25 and on IV *prt* 23⁶².

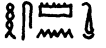
For [22] both his wife and his daughter are mentioned; the first entry written *m* , as in the case of the wife of [21]. For the wife of [27] the note occurs twice, in the first instance written . From this writing it appears that the word *hsmn* is meant⁶³ which is usually translated as "menstruation"⁶⁴, a rendering that was alluded to in a remark in Spiegelberg's "Graffiti" (p.VI) about these entries.

The matter may be less obvious than it looks at first sight, however. That all the wives and daughters of forty workmen during about seventy days only ten times had their monthly periods looks a bit unlikely. One may of course suggest extreme slovenliness in noting the absences, but that would make the entire text unreliable not only for us, but also for the administration for which it was composed.

⁶⁰ Written . oDeM. 389 may date from the reign of Amenmesse.

⁶¹ The Wb (Belegstellen to IV, 18, 10) also refers to the unpublished oGardiner 62.

⁶² The only other instances I know of occur in oMMA 14.6.217 (= Hier. Ostr. 64,1). 7 and vso 7 (*hmt.f* ) , and in two unpublished ostraca: oGardiner 167, 8 (*t3y.f hmt* ) and oTurin 9619, 4 (*iw t3y.f hmt* ) ; both texts date from the later reigns of the XIXth Dynasty.

⁶³ This is confirmed by oDeM 230, 3: *p3 iy m hsmn* () *n s3t.f Nfrw*.

⁶⁴ Grundriß der Medizin VII, 2 (= Mediz. Wb II), 635.

The solution of the problem has to be sought in another direction⁶⁵.

The verb *ḥsmn* of course means "to purify", being derived from the word for "natron"⁶⁶. Purification of a woman took place during the fortnight after she had given birth, at the end of which a feast was celebrated, as pWestcar shows⁶⁷. It may be that for that reason the word *ḥsmn* is used in the medical papyri⁶⁸; so far as I can see the usual interpretation is too definite.

An argument in favour of my suggestion is that the text contains not a single entry mentioning birth. The only ostrakon recording days of absence for that reason that I know of is oCairo 25517, where in vso 6 we read: *ḫw t3y.f ḥmt m mst*, followed by *ḫw. wsf 3 hrw*⁶⁹. The fact that the husband is not said to have taken a day off because of the purification but because of the birth itself is one of the inconsistencies with which the ostraca bristle. Still, it looks to me probable that the free days explained by the note "his wife" or "his daughter was purified" were caused by a antecedent childbirth. Normally every woman in the community would have had a baby every year, which means for the wives of forty workmen about 8 births in the seventy days recorded, if they all were still young enough for it. Actually there are five instances recorded for wives, which seems to be in accordance with what we might expect. That the fathers were also concerned in the purification of their daughters seems not unlikely.

Unfortunately, there is a fly in the ointment. For the wife of [27] the note *ḥsmn* occurs twice within a space of nearly three months (I prt 25 to IV prt 23). It is obvious that this cannot indicate a purification after delivery in both instances. If the first entry indeed has this meaning, the second could be explained by suggesting a mis-

⁶⁵ For the following I am much indebted to Professor Emma Brunner-Traut whose answers to my question confirmed my thoughts and added new arguments which she kindly has allowed me to publish here.

⁶⁶ Wb III, 163, 3 - 5.

⁶⁷ pWestcar XI, 18 ff. Cf., e.g., Brunner-Traut, *Die alten Ägypter*, Stuttgart 1974, 60 ff.


⁶⁸ In pEbers 97, 2 and pEdwin Smith 20, 13, the same expression occurs, with only small variants: *n ḫy n.s ḥsmn* (Sm.: *m ḥsmn*, like in our ostrakon, vso 4). This is usually understood to mean that the woman has had no menstruation, but literally it refers to a purification; whether after a period of menstruation or after given birth is not clear. In the third occurrence referred to in Mediz. Wb II, 635, also from the pEbers, a translation "purification" seems equally well possible. The matter dealt with is the lack of regularity of the monthly periods after the woman's *ḥsmn*. In the fourth occurrence, pRam. IV, D III, 3, the authors of the Mediz. Wb themselves suggested "Reinigung?". Of course, if the purification after having given birth was generally called *ḥsmn*, the term

carriage, which then had also to be followed by a purification ritual. How many of such events are hidden behind the other mentions of *ḥsmn* we cannot know; it was of no importance to the list of absences to include any indication in this respect.

Comparing the dates, it appears that on IV *prt* 23 the daughter of [6] and the wife of [27] are both mentioned, which does suggest that Simūt [27] was married to the daughter of Wadjmose [6]. From Turin stela 50012⁷⁰ we know that Simūt's wife was called Pshēde, but that she was Wadjmose's daughter I cannot confirm from any other document.

A second category of reasons for absences is mainly concerned with work other than the usual in the royal tombs. By far the most frequent note in this respect, second only in the entire text to *mr*, "ill", is *m-ḥ hry.f*, "with his chief", which occurs nearly sixty times. It means that the workman was "with" the foreman of the 'side' to which he belonged. Of the same type is the entry *m-ḥ sš*, "with the scribe", occurring eight times, but only in the case of four men, namely [9] (twice), [35] (twice), [36] (three times) and [37] (only once). In the case of [9] the note may perhaps be connected with the two preceding ones, *f3y inrw (n sš)*⁷¹, "carrying stones (for the scribe)". However, carrying stones is merely recorded on three days: I *prt* 24 (nos. [13] and [29]), II *prt* 7 (nos. [8], [9], [29]⁷² and [34]), and on the following day for [9]. The entry in which [9] is stated to be "with the scribe" (II *prt* 23 and 24), therefore, rather seems not to belong to this category.

In contrast to carrying stones, to be "with the scribe" is noted for each workman on a different day, except for [36] and [37], who did it together on IV *prt* 8⁷³. [9] and [35] did it on two consecutive days, the others only one day at a time. On the other hand, being "with the

can have been used too as referring to the delivery with all that used to follow. This seems to be indicated by the writing .

⁶⁹ The words of oCairo 25516, vso 17: ... *t3y.f ḥmt msy*..., may also explain an absence from work, but owing to the lacunae before and after them this remains uncertain.

⁷⁰ Tosi-Roccati, 48.

⁷¹ In the second instance abbreviated to *f3i inrw*.

⁷² No. [29] is the only one recorded at both instances.

⁷³ For [36] it was the third time.

chief" occurred up to four, five or even six days in succession, although single days are also recorded⁷⁴

What kind of work the men did when with their superiors is not stated since it was of no importance for the present document. Other ostraca provide ample information, particularly the series oCairo 25516-'521. All different kinds of jobs are mentioned, for instance: making baskets and wooden objects such as a statue or a chest, painting coffins, feeding the ox of the foreman, and working in his tomb⁷⁵. From pSalt 124 one has concluded that such work for the chief was illegal, but that is evidently not correct. Pnēb probably "went too far in the practice"⁷⁶, but the practice itself was normal. Hay, Pnēb's colleague, was also served in this way, and the entry *m-c ḥry.f* occurs as frequently on oCairo 25783, from the time of Amenmesse, as in our ostraccon from the reign of Ramesses II. In some texts it is stated that the objects that were manufactured were intended for the vizier⁷⁷, certainly as a bakshish, but that was hardly illegal. Work for superiors was apparently so normal that it is only casually indicated by the term *m-c*, "with"; it was conceived of as a valid excuse by the authorities for not attending to work in the royal tomb.

It looks possible that "carrying stones" was not a job for the profit of the scribe privately, although from what we know about Kēḥikhopshēf's character this would not be impossible⁷⁸. It is, however, never noted in connection with a foreman⁷⁹, whereas Kēḥikhopshēf ordered it on other occasions too⁸⁰. What stones were carried and why we do not know.

The workmen appear to have also sometimes taken a day off for themselves. Two instances are noted:[6] busied himself on IV *šmw* 6 with (re?) building his house, and on II *prt* 16 no.[20] seems to have removed a door⁸¹. Other texts also mention occasionally building activities, e.g.

⁷⁴ No. [37] from II *prt* 13 to 18, and again from III *prt* 25 to 28; no. [2] from II *prt* 13 to 17; no. [11] from III *šḥt* 21 to 24. Entries for a single day are, e.g., [16] on IV *prt* 3 (again on days 7 and 8) and on IV *prt* 24; [37] on III *šmw* 21.

⁷⁵ See also Černý, *Workmen*, 247.

⁷⁶ *Op.cit.*, 129.

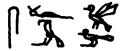

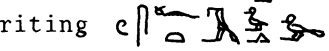
⁷⁷ E.g., oCairo 25517, *ḏ*, 3-4 and vso 15 (a *krf*).

⁷⁸ Černý, *Workmen*, 332.

⁷⁹ Pnēb (pSalt 124, 2, 5) is accused of ordering the workmen to cut stones on top of the workshop in the tomb of Sethōs II, which may have been an outrage because of the place.

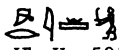
⁸⁰ E.g., oCairo 25783, vso 17 and 20 (on III *šmw* 11 and 15); both times seven men. In vso 25 ff. the same men are said to be "with" him on the 16th and the 17th.

oCairo 25521, 13, where a workman is said to be "building his wall"⁸². Usually such private building, and also work in the workmen's own tombs⁸³, would have been done on one of the numerous free days⁸⁴.

From a number of texts it appears that the necropolis workmen constructed and painted tomb furniture and made baskets as a subsidiary business. This too would mostly have been done on free days, but possibly they sometimes took off a day for it. It may be that the word *wsf* in our text refers to such occasions. Literally it means "to be slack, to neglect", but in the language of the necropolis workmen it is the usual indication for "to be absent". It occurs five times in the text (twice for [36]), written twice as , twice abbreviated to  - common in ostraca - while once the curious writing  is used⁸⁵. All five instances are recorded for a different day. Obviously it was immaterial for the purpose of the text for what reason the man was absent, which suggests a private matter⁸⁶.

Although it is the opposite of work, it may here be the place to discuss the feast which [28] celebrated on I 3 $\dot{h}t$ 14 and 15⁸⁷. On the first of these days nos. [1] and [36] attended the drinking party. For [1] this is explicitly stated (*sw² m-c Hnsw*), while with [36] we find only the note *sw²*, "drinking", but since it occurred on the same day it very probably took place with [28]. Private feasts are frequently mentioned in the ostraca, in some instances, as here, called *hb.f*, "his feast"⁸⁸,



See also oDeM. 389, 12-vso 2.

⁸¹ The verb is written , like the adjective "strong", but may stand for *qr*, "to remove" (cf. Wb V, 595, 5-9). In pAbbott 2, 9, the latter verb occurs in the sense of "removing" the pyramid from a tomb.

⁸² Whether the four men recorded to have been absent for "building in the granary" in oCairo 25563 were ordered to do this work is uncertain, but probable.

⁸³ The work in private tombs referred to in the dossier pBerlin 10496 + oBM 5624 + oFlorence 2621 does not seem to have been done during the 'weekend'; the first two texts mention I *Smw* 6 and 7. In oCairo 25521, 14, Amenemōne is said to be working in the *gnw* (possibly: "chapel"); the date is lost, but obviously it was a normal working day.

⁸⁴ The work mentioned in oAshm.Mus. 1945.39 (= Hier.Ostr. 72, 1), rto 21 - vso 3, is not dated; that of oLouvre E. 13160 (= Hier.Ostr. 65, 1) took place on the 14th, 16th and 18th, hence on normal working days.

⁸⁵ Also in oIFA0 1357 (Allam, Hier. Ostraka und Papyri, pl. 58), 6 and 9, and in oDeM 340, 3.6. vso 1 and 2. For  instead of , see oDeM 209, passim.

⁸⁶ For a reason that is frequently mentioned, *m t3y.f Ct*, see p. 150.

⁸⁷ Except for the two days "with his chief" of [38] and the illness of the doctor this is the only event recorded for the month I 3 $\dot{h}t$; see above, p.133.

⁸⁸ E.g., oCairo 25782, 8; 25793, 2.3.4; oGardiner 37 (= Hier.Ostr. 26, 3), 8; oTurin 9619, 2 and 9 (unpubl.).

in others *p3y.f hb*⁸⁹. In still other entries the feast is defined as "his" festival of Hathor⁹⁰ or "his" festival of 'Imn-*tḥn-nfr*⁹¹. These additions prove that Gardiner's suggestion⁹² for translating *hb* in oPetrie 11 (= Hier.Ostr. 1), vso 7 as "marriage" can hardly be correct in all instances, as he himself seems to have realized according to his note 8. Théodoridès' remark in this respect⁹³ is far too positive. The matter requires further investigation.

How we perhaps have to visualize such a drinking party can be illustrated from oDeM 570. A group of persons, including women, are described as "drinking" in the 'fortress of the necropolis', while the gang was at work "in that place", that is, in the royal tomb.

For a drinking party it was necessary to brew beer in advance⁹⁴, and this leads us to the third category of reasons for absence, which are of a religious nature; although that is not immediately evident for the first one, namely *ctḥ*, "to brew"⁹⁵.

Brewing is recorded in the following instances:

- on I *pṛt* 18, for [11], [15], [37] and [16]; the last one also on the 17th;
- on II *pṛt* 8, for [4], [12], [17] and [30];
- on II *pṛt* 17, for [16] and [32];
- on III *pṛt* 18, for [5]⁹⁶;
- on III *pṛt* 28, for [9] and [13];
- on I *šmw* 27, for [23];
- on II *šmw* 8, for [17];

in total 16 times, of which only [16] on two consecutive days. The same man did it again on II *pṛt* 17. Of the others, the only one recor-

⁸⁹ oMichael. 48, I, 11 (Goedicke-Wente, pl. 71); oDeM 209, 7 and vso 2 (in vso 4 only *hb*); oA.G. 32, 2 (unpubl.).

⁹⁰ Hier. Ostr. 31,1, vso I, 6-7; 60, 2, 2; 63, 3, 3 (*p3 hb n ḥt-ḥr*).

⁹¹ Hier. Ostr. 31, 1, 2. Other festivals are that of Ptah (oDeM 230, 8; oMichael. 48, I, 4); of *RĒ^c* (oMichael. 48, II, 5); of Twēre (oDeM 230, 5 and 6; Hier. Ostr. 63, 3, 1); of Isis (oDeM 230, 7); of Mertseger (Hier.Ostr. 63, 3, 4). I do not know what is meant in oA.G. 32, vso 5 with *p3y.f hb n p3 s3* (~~ḥ~~ |).

⁹² in: WZKM 54, 1957, 45.

⁹³ in: RIDA 23, 1976, 19 and 55 note 138.

⁹⁴ Cf. oCairo 25521, vso 16: *ctḥ <r> p3y.f hb*.

⁹⁵ For beer and brewing in general, cf. Wolfgang Helck, *Das Bier im Alten Ägypten*, Berlin 1971.

⁹⁶ This is the only date in the decade; is III *pṛt* a mistake for I *pṛt*? The entry would still have to be at the same place in the series.

ed twice is [17]. All dates are just before the 'weekend', being either the 7th or the 8th of a decade. On the other hand, some decades of which the 7th and 8th day are mentioned for other reasons (e.g., III *šmw* 7-8 and 17-18, and IV *šmw* 7-8) do not contain any entry of *ctḥ*.

Brewing is recorded as reason for absence of the workmen in ostraca from the time of Sethōs II and Amenmesse too (oCairo 25779 - '783), and, in one instance there, the purpose of the brewing is stated. In oCairo 25782, 4 we read that on IV *prt* 2 a man brewed "for Hathor"⁹⁷. The same is said to have been done on III *šmw* 25 in oCairo 25533, 8 (from the XXth Dynasty), while according to oCairo 25521, vso 15 it happened on an unknown day (possibly I *prt* 28) (for) "his feast". Like on some of the days recorded in our text, the brewing for Hathor of oCairo 25782 is done by a group of men at the same day.

From these entries we may conclude that, when stated as a reason for absence, it was not the ordinary production of beer that was meant. Since it was the common beverage of the people beer would have been brewed regularly during the months, particularly since it was of a quality that would not have kept for more than a few days. Such normal brewing would hardly have been a reason for absence from work⁹⁸. Therefore, all instances in our text will have recorded preparations for a festival - religious festivals were generally celebrated during the 'weekend' - and in most instances the feast will have been of a religious nature. These feasts were obviously not celebrated by the entire community; unless we have to assume that particular workmen brewed for the entire village, for which I know no proof. Possibly the feast of [28] discussed above, although not on a 'weekend', was also a religious event, but clearly only for him and his close friends.

⁹⁷ For "preparing the beer jug for Renenutet" on I *prt* 20, mentioned on a stela, cf. Clère, in: RdE 27, 1975, 76. As Clère remarks, this is the date of the festival called "the Navigation of Wadjet".

⁹⁸ It may be appropriate to draw the attention to the fact that the ceremonial brewing was an activity of the men. Whether the everyday brewing for the households was one of the tasks of the housewives does not appear from our sources. In representations the brewer is usually a man, but since these may always be professional brewers it does not settle the problem. Cf. Rosemarie Drenkhahn, *Die Handwerker und ihre Tätigkeiten im Alten Ägypten*, Wiesbaden, 1976, 134.

The word *wḏn*, "offering", points to a similar event. An offering was brought on I *prt* 14 by [3], [10], [14], [18] and [35]; then also by [3] on the following day and by [14] once more later in the year, on IV *šmw* 4. "Offerings", when recorded in the text, were not a reason for a general free day; they were brought either by a small group or by a single workman, while the others were at work. That it could be an important matter appears from the fact that on I *prt* 14 not only the doctor [18] but even no. [10] was present, although the latter had been ill during the preceding period and remained absent because of illness during the following days (see p. 136).

An offering was usually brought to a divinity⁹⁹. In oCairo 25782, 7, workman Pendwau is stated as bringing one to the *Hnwt-mhyt* (that is, Hathor) on IV *prt* 28, and Amenemope "ditto"¹⁰⁰. In our text the word *wḏn* is mostly followed by *n p3 ntr*, "to the god"; only in the second instance of [14] by *n ntr.f*, "to his god". Who was the god is not stated; it was irrelevant for the list, and probably everybody knew it. Since it was a male god, it cannot have been Hathor. Is it too wild a guess to suggest that on I *prt* 14 the members of a congregation connected with one of the chapels at the north side of the valley¹⁰¹ were celebrating their (annual?) festival? The divinity of such a chapel could very well be called "his" god. A further suggestion may be that in several of these chapels, e.g. those dedicated to the kings, the divinity proper was Amūn.

In this connection I may refer to one of the charges of Amennakhte against Pnēb (pSalt 124, vso 1, 13 ff.). He relates how Pnēb induced him to take an oath not to go anymore to the *hnw* of his mother and father and how Pnēb even ordered an accomplice to call out in the village: "Let nobody of the family of the foreman Nebnūfe (the father of Amennakhte) be seen going to offer to Amūn, their god". One is tempted to connect such a visit to a *hnw* (chapel?) with the entry of IV *šmw* 4, when [14] was offering alone. And perhaps also with the exceptional entry for [28], that on IV *prt* 8 he was "with his god" (*m-c ntr.f*). Although here no offering is mentioned, the man may have passed

⁹⁹ The day of offering to Amūn at the Valley Festival is mentioned in oDeM. 127, vso 1-2; the day of offering to Ptah in the Great Field (i.e., the Valley of the Kings), in oDeM. 401.

¹⁰⁰ Note that Amenemope is said to be brewing for Hathor on the preceding day. A connection between this preparation of beer and the offering looks plausible.

¹⁰¹ For their seats inscribed with their names, see Deir el-Médineh 1948 à 1951, Le Caire 1953, 50 (no. 48).

a day in a chapel¹⁰².

Still another religious ceremony for which the workmen stayed away from their work was *w3ḥ-mw*, "libating". On I *prt* 24 and the days following [3] is said to have done this "for his father". On the 25th it is also recorded for [8], but without mention for whom, and with [23], who was libating "for his son". Whether this means that for some reason these days were suitable for libation is quite obscure. It may also be that the son of [23] was the father (or father-in-law) of [3], but that too is unknown. The only other day on which a libation took place is II *šmw* 8, when [22] did so, very probably for his brother whom he had "wrapped up" on the preceding day¹⁰³.

W3ḥ-mw occurs in other ostraca too as a reason for absence¹⁰⁴, but never with an indication as to for whom it was done. From our text it seems to have been done for a deceased person, in one instance immediately after the burial, in others perhaps after a longer time and on particular days.

A last, enigmatic type of entry, mentioned twice, runs: *krst p3 ntr*, "burial of the god". It is recorded for [11] and [22], in both instances on IV *3ḥt* 17. As in the case of "offering for the god", it is uncertain which divinity is meant. It cannot be Amenophis I, the patron of the village, since he died on III *prt* 19 or 20¹⁰⁵.

Moreover, such a ceremony would certainly have been attended by the entire community, not by two men only¹⁰⁶. I do not know of any other reference to the ritual from ostraca or papyri of Deir el-Medīna, and I cannot at present offer any explanation as to its meaning.

Some final remarks have to be made relating to those reasons for absence that occur frequently in other ostraca but never in our text. One of them is the word *knkn*, "to beat, to fight with". Violence is

¹⁰² For passing a day "in his *ḥrw*", see oBerlin 10637 (Hier.Pap. Berlin III, pl. 33), 7-8. For *ḥrw*, cf. JESHO 11, 1968, 161 f.

¹⁰³ See above, p. 141.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., oCairo 25779, 20 and vso 19; 25784, 6; 25786, 2; oTurin 57034, 6; oDeM 551, vso 5-6; all on different days.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Franz-Jürgen Schmitz, Amenophis I, HÄB 6, Hildesheim 1978, 22.

¹⁰⁶ III *prt* 19-20 are indeed 'free' days in this text, but so is every 'weekend'.

mentioned several times¹⁰⁷, usually with an indication of the person who was beaten. In one instance a man is stated to have fought with his wife¹⁰⁸. The quarrel recorded in oCairo 25779, vso 12-18 lasted no less than six days. During the days recorded in oBM 5634 it never seems to have led to the absence of a workman.

A last common reason for absence is called: *m t3y.f* (or *t3*) *ct*¹⁰⁹. The word *ct* indicates a privately-owned dwelling outside the village, either in the valley of Deir el-Medīna or elsewhere in the region. What people did on those days is uncertain; possibly they were just sitting in the shade, or working for others (see above, p. 145). Perhaps such free days were covered in our text by the indication *wsf*.

As was said in the beginning, the catalogue of reasons for absence from work presented here may not be of much intrinsic value, but it illustrates the circumstances under which the necropolis workmen at Thebes were living during the XIXth and XXth Dynasties. They are almost the only commoners from ancient Egypt about whose life we are able to narrate some details. Most of the events discussed here happen in every age, though a few are specific for this particular community. Together they elucidate the way of life in Pharaonic times.

¹⁰⁷ E.g., oCairo 25506, 6; 25517, δ , 6; 25518, vso 6; 25779, vso 12. 13. 15. 16. 17. 18; 25783, 29; oGardiner 37 (=Hier.Ostr. 26, 3), 2 and vso 2.

¹⁰⁸ oCairo 25521, 12. In oDeM 36, 1-2 (of year 31 of Ramesses III) the 'scribe' (actually foreman) Nekhemmūt is said to have "quarrelled" (*tttt*) with his people, but that does not imply violence.

¹⁰⁹ E.g., oCairo 25506, 10; 25513, 6; 25519, vso 22 (*m t3 ct n P...*); 25523, 6-7; 25526, II, 4; 25781, 2. 4. 5. 8; oTurin 57030, 3; 57056, 5; oGardiner 37 (= Hier. Ostr. 26, 3), vso 6; oVarille 6, 6 (unpubl.); oA.G. 32, vso 7 (unpubl.).

	III <i>3pt</i>	IV <i>3pt</i>	I <i>prt</i>	II <i>prt</i>	III <i>prt</i>	IV <i>prt</i>
1						
2						
3						16
4						
5						
6						
7		10 17 18 28				16
8		10 17 18		8 9 19 20 26 29 34		16 25 28 36 37
9				4 9 12 17 19 20 30 36	20 ¹	
10						
11						
12				2 18 37		
13				2 3 33 37		
14			3 10 14 18 35	2 3 33 36 37		
15		5 10 18 22	3 10 20	2 20 37		
16		5 5 10 18	10 15 16 27 37	2 20 32 37 37		
17		5 11 18 21 22 25	10 11 15 16 27 37	2 16 29 32 37 37	5 ²	
18						
19						
20						
21	4 9 10 11 17 18					
22	4 9 10 11 17 18					
23	3 9 10 11 17 18					
24						
25			3 8 13 17 23 25 27 29 37	2 9 20 29 36 37		
26						
27						
28					8 16 18 28 36 37	
29					9 13 16 28 36 37	
30						
						6 27 9 16 9 35

¹ see P. 141.
² see P. 148, note 96.

	I <i>šems</i>	II <i>šems</i>	III <i>šems</i>	IV <i>šems</i>	I <i>šit</i>	
1						1
2		18				2
3		18 25 30 33	18 19	4		3
4		3 5		4 14 17 18 24 31		4
5		18 25 30	19	4 17 18 24 31		5
6		18 25 30 35	32	4 6 17 18 24 31		6
7		15 18 25 30 35	5 19 32	4 17 18 24 31 35		7
8		7 18 22 25 30 35	5 11 19 32	17 18 24 31 35		8
9		7 15 17 18 22 30 35		17 18 24 31 35		9
10						10
11						11
12						12
13						13
14		2 3 23			1 28 36 38	14
15		3 23			28 38 18	15
16	7 37		4 18 32			16
17	7 37		4 18 32			17
18			4 18 32			18
19						19
20						20
21			4 18 31 37			21
22			4 18 31			22
23						23
24			5	18 31		24
25	18 25 37			16 18 31		25
26	18 25 37			16 18 22 28 31		26
27	10 18 23 25 37					27
28						28
29						29
30						30