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Höhe 12,5 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum Acc. no. 31.4.1a.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544521>.

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Hieratic in the tomb of Ameneminet (TT 277). Epigraphic survey and comparisons among the script typologies present in the tomb

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Abstract

Theban tomb 277, located in Qurnet Murai and belonging to Ameneminet, priest in the temple of Amenhotep III during the Ramesside period, houses a number of hieratic texts. A few of them are visitors' graffiti, possibly belonging to colleagues of the deceased, but most of them also play an important role as captions, as if to fill gaps in the incomplete decoration. This paper analyses some of the secondary hieratic and cursive inscriptions as well as their relationship to the primary texts, bringing to light the image of a strongly cohesive community, for which epigraphic activities represent almost an identity marker. It also establishes graphic and orthographic comparisons among the three main types of script (polychrome-painted hieroglyphs, cursive black hieroglyphs and hieratic) present in the tomb, in order to gain a deeper insight into the agency behind the different graphic registers.

1 The tomb-chapel of Ameneminet (TT 277) and its social context

The Theban tomb-chapel of Ameneminet, TT 277,² represents a treasure trove of material for the study of ancient Egyptian 'graphic registers' (fig. 1),³ offering a particularly wide range of cursive to non-cursive inscriptions. The tomb is located in the south-west area of Qurnet Murai and dates to the Ramesside period.⁴ It was dis-

1 The author is deeply grateful to Chloé Ragazzoli for kindly sharing her work on the tomb as well on the topic of graphic registers, and for her extremely helpful comments in the preparation of this article.

2 PM² I, 1, 353–55; Kampp 1996, 548–50, fig. 444. The hieratic inscriptions have also recently been documented and inventoried by Ragazzoli 2016, 261–274.

3 Expression coined by Ragazzoli and Albert, in preparation: "Graphic registers refer to the visual and material aspect of a writing apprehended through its script, its layout or the medium used, and the associated meanings."

4 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, p. 1 and n. 4, dates it to the reigns of Seti I and Ramsesses II, based on the palaeographic analysis. This dating is supported also by Ragazzoli 2016, 222. Kampp 1996, 548 and Hofmann 2004, 50, instead, date the tomb to the 20th dynasty based on style. The



Fig. 1: Diagram of selected graphic registers present in TT 277 (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)

covered in 1917 for the IFAO by Lecomte du Nouÿ, but the publication by Vandier d’Abbadie appeared only in 1954.⁵ The author personally re-investigated the decoration as part of her PhD research during the Spring 2018 season with the Swiss Mission in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, under the patronage of the Swiss National Science Foundation.⁶

The small one-chamber chapel has an irregularly rectangular perimeter and uneven wall surfaces, which have been plastered in order to accommodate the paint. The floor level is carved lower than the entrance, so that water has flown in and damaged the bottom register of the decoration. The colours are otherwise very well preserved: as analyses have shown, the red paint comes, as it is most common, from haematite, the yellow one from goethite, and the black one from carbon.⁷ The decoration and the inscriptions of the tomb are incomplete and, as Bács and Hofmann have argued, do not seem to be the work of the most skilled artisans of the time, as the imprecise proportions and the execution of pictorial details and

temple of Amenhotep III fell into disuse after an earthquake in 1200 BC, see Sourouzian 2015, 77. Despite this event, Bács 2011, 9 also supports the later dating, specifying that Amenemint worked in “the still operational parts of the temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el Heitan”. A definite solution is to be postponed until better light is shed on the life of the temple.

5 A brief report on the discovery appeared in Gauthier 1920. Foucart 1918 extensively described some of the scenes in the tomb. The tomb was also visited in 1924–25 by J. G. Wilkinson, who copied the scene of the Theban mountain with the statues of Mentuhotep II and Ahmes-Nefertari (MMA 30.4.124), during the Metropolitan Museum expedition to Egypt. Vandier d’Abbadie 1954.

6 Research conducted in the context of the SNSF-funded project “Life Histories of Theban tombs” (2015–19): <https://lhtt.philhist.unibas.ch/>.

7 Marey Mahmoud 2013, 783ff.

inscriptions show.⁸ Independently from an aesthetic judgement, however, this confirms the somewhat informal context of the tomb preparation. In truth, evidence would point towards part of the inscriptions being added by autonomous scribes, possibly colleagues of the deceased, who wanted to contribute to the completion of the tomb.

Ameneminet was, in fact, a *wab* priest, lector priest, and divine father of Ptah-Sokar in the temple of Amenhotep III,⁹ married to the chantress of Amun, Nefertari. Five children seem to be recorded in the tomb, but the preservation state of the inscriptions is insufficient to obtain clearer information. One of them, Kenamun, held the title of *wab* priest of Ptah as well.¹⁰

Ameneminet seems to have been very proud of, and attached to, his priestly office, as well as a generally pious man. That he considered his office an important identity marker is shown already by the area where he chose to be buried, as Qurnet Murai houses a cluster of tombs connected with the funerary temple of Amenhotep III in Kom el-Hittan,¹¹ TT 277 being located directly in its axis.¹² The desire to exhibit both his social identity as well as his piety comes out strongly in the decoration. Not only did he choose to have depicted, on the focal back wall, an imitation of the royal kiosk icon, housing Amenhotep III and queen Tiy,¹³ but also to show the procession of statues of the two sovereigns on the north wall, clear reference to his office.¹⁴ Other royal figures appear on the north wall, where Ameneminet is represented honouring the statue of Mentuhotep II, the founder of the Middle Kingdom. Behind this king, a queen Neferys is visible also, almost coming out of the mountain.¹⁵ Despite the possibility that the queen might be Mentuhotep's royal

8 Bács 2018, 22; Hofmann 2004, 50, 110.

9 Cf. the inscription on the southern entrance thickness (Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 28). The temple of Amenhotep III was dedicated to Amun-Ra and to Ptah-Sokar; it was to them that the two monumental stelae of the peristyle entrance were dedicated, as well as the stelae composing the back of the northern quartzite colossi (Sourouzian 2015, 86; 87).

10 Inscription on the niche lintel. Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 29.

11 In particular: TT 271, belonging to Amenemwia, also *wab* priest and lector priest of Ptah-Sokar; TT 272, belonging to Khaemipet, who bears the same titles as Ameneminet (divine father of Amun in Thebes, *wab* priest, lector priest in the temple of Sokar); TT 275, Sobekmose, again divine father in the temple of Amenhotep III and in the temple of Sokar. For the relationship between location and funerary temple cf. also Bács 2011, 9. The area had been chosen in the 18th dynasty to host the tombs of the Viceroys of Kush, see Berenguer 2003.

12 Ragazzoli 2016, 222.

13 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, pls. 19–20. Much/very common in 18th dynasty tombs, the royal kiosk icon (definition by Hartwig 2004) is also present in the nearby TT 222, as Bács noticed (Bács 2018, 9, n. 73).

14 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 17–20, pls. 10–11. Similar processions of statues are present in other early Ramesside tombs, such as TT 19 and TT 51: Foucart 1935; Davies 1927.

15 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, pl. 14.

wife, Neferu, the connection with the Theban mountain and the black colour of the queen's skin would hint at an identification with Ahmes Nefertari, ancestress of the 18th dynasty kings. Ameneminet would therefore display his piety not only to the king in whose temple he served, but also to the institution of the Theban monarchy altogether, in the persons of the founding figure of the Middle Kingdom (Mentuhotep II) and of the New Kingdom (Ahmes Nefertari) respectively. Finally, on the left side of the focal wall, Ameneminet is shown offering to Harakhte.¹⁶ The texts, as well, show Ameneminet's connection with the religious world. Although only few inscriptions were completed, a hymn to Osiris and Re fills the North entrance thickness, and the adoration of Ra-Harakhte runs on the stela depicted on the north wall.¹⁷

Ameneminet therefore strives to display his identity as member of a strongly cohesive community, composed by the *wab* priests of the temple. In fact, as this paper attempts to show, many of the additions to the texts and of the signatures left by visitors belong precisely to other members of the priesthood, which, as Den Doncker has pointed out, might have even been colleagues and friends of the deceased.¹⁸ This strong sense of community could also explain why Ameneminet was able to prepare for himself a decorated tomb in the Qurnet Murai necropolis despite his relatively minor position.¹⁹ The decoration is populated by *wab* priests and other figures related to the funerary temple of Amenhotep III. A *wab* priest and divine father Piay writes his name in sketched hieroglyphs in front of the face of a lector priest,²⁰ and probably also in a similar position in the miniature of the painted stela²¹ (Inscriptions 5b and 5a, respectively). In more elegant literary cursive, still with hieratic elements, a *wab* priest Ptahmes is named between the two mummies (in the same hand is written the caption on the figure of Ameneminet's wife, Nefertari; Inscriptions 4a–b).²² Accompanying the procession of the two royal statues are also a series of (apparently already deceased) priests: in monochrome hieroglyphs are mentioned a *sem* priest from the temple of Nebmaatre,²³ another *wab* priest Piay, his son,²⁴ a *wab* priest Userhat, and a divine father of Ptah-Sokar Ptahmes.²⁵ Two hieratic inscriptions almost work as captions and imply the presence of more *wab*

16 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, pl. 6 no. 1.

17 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 28–29 and 34–35.

18 Den Doncker 2012.

19 The author thanks Chloé Ragazzoli for this interesting comment.

20 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 32, 3a.

21 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 35, [6]c.

22 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 33, [4]e.

23 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, pl. 10.

24 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, pl. 10.

25 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 33, 5a and 5b, respectively.

priests and of a divine father in the cortege of offering bearers.²⁶ Another priest affiliated to the temple of Sokar, Minmes, names himself in hieratic as *sem* priest libating on the offerings (Inscription 2a),²⁷ while yet another *wab* priest P'ay left his hieratic inscription above the painted stela (Inscription 2c).²⁸ A “*wab* priest, divine father of Ptah-Sokar in the temple of Amun” makes offerings in front of a *wab* priest of Ptah (Ameneminet himself?) at the banquet in the lowest register of the north wall.²⁹ Chanters and chantresses of Ptah or Amun also make various appearances: a chantress of Amun named Takheret leaves her signature above the head of one of the lamenting women (Inscription 2d); a chanter of Ptah-Sokar, as well, adds his name in front of the depiction of a harpist (Inscription 1b). Finally, though slightly different from the other hieratic inscriptions, the two signatures on the southern wall belong again to two *wab* priests of the funerary temple of Amenhotep III (Inscriptions 3a–b). This overview already shows that the secondary epigraphy in the tomb is the work of the same social actors responsible for the first, to the point that only fuzzy boundaries divide the two ritual expressions.

2 Epigraphic survey

Among the elements that differentiate the two epigraphic moments is, when not the purpose, the choice of graphic registers. Despite all the secondary inscriptions being consistent in terms of the social status of their author, each of them presents a different writing style, as if the scribes purposely aimed at individualisation. The coexistence of a huge variety of script typologies in the whole of the decoration becomes visible through an epigraphic survey. The decoration can be divided in four areas: the entrance inscriptions, the continuous paintings in the northern area, the larger scale scenes, mostly unfinished, in the southern part, and finally the central niche.

2.1 Entrance outer doorjambs, entrance thickness

Engraved hieroglyphs divided in two columns and painted in red appear on the outer doorjambs. The entrance thickness, instead, supposed to welcome the visitor, has been inscribed with carefully executed polychrome hieroglyphs, a clearly purposeful choice. However, this type of hieroglyphs, a typical characteristic of Ramesside palaeography, does not present outlines nor inner detail-lines, but consists of patches

²⁶ Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 32, 4b–c.

²⁷ Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 33, [4]d.

²⁸ Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 34, 6a.

²⁹ Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 31, 1c–d.

of colour and is far from the ‘picture writing’ of the polychrome inscriptions in 18th dynasty tombs. In addition, it renounces the use of yellow, reducing the colour palette to blue, green, and red (fig. 1, top, second from right).³⁰

2.2 South walls

The three walls of the south part are the least complete, yet they still present at least three different graphic registers. In the depiction of the royal kiosk, directly visible upon entrance in focal position, the titulary of the king and of queen Tiy have been written in monumental, polychrome hieroglyphs. Although this type of monumentalized script wants to imitate the inscriptions in temples and in the tombs of the 18th dynasty, a difference in quality is clear to the eye (fig. 1, top, right). In addition, the colour palette is again reduced, giving a different effect to the older models. The colours blue, green and red are preferred, with no yellow for the inner details of the sign Gardiner R4 (𓅓 , *hṯp*). Peculiar is also the colour of the Gardiner S38 sign (𓆎 , *hḳ*), which presents a blue base, instead of the more typical yellow with blue inner details.³¹ Finally, an important feature that distinguishes them from the other examples of monumental hieroglyphs is the use of a blue outline for the signs, as opposite to the typical red outline. These characteristics show the influence of the new Ramesside polychrome hieroglyphs mentioned above and present in the entrance thickness; they also contribute to the general impression that the painters of the tomb might not have been completely familiar with this type of representation.

For the prayer dedicated by Ameneminet to the two rulers, the painter has adopted again the simplified polychrome hieroglyphs with no outline, and with only minor details precised through the use of different colours and not of red brushstrokes. Indeed, were it not for the use of more colours, these hieroglyphs would be much comparable with a cursive script. This inscription, written on a yellow background, follows the shape of the wall, so that one column is inserted in the curving corner between the South-East and the South wall. No inscriptions accompany the rest of the scenes in the south part of the tomb, but judging from the rest of the prepared yellow background, they were probably supposed to be of the same type. However, the possibility of a monochrome text cannot be excluded, when consid-

30 This type of reduced polychrome hieroglyphs appears starting from the early Ramesside period, and is one of the topics of the author’s dissertation.

31 This is also the case in an older tomb in Deir el-Medina. Here, like in TT 277, the change seems ascribable to the little familiarity of the painters with their models. Cf. Sartori, in preparation.

ering the captions to the statues of Mentuhotep II and queen Neferys on the North wall, inscribed again on a yellow background.³²

Finally, secondary inscriptions are present in the form of hieratic visitors' signatures. They appear both in front of a god, Osiris and Shu respectively, as if they were words coming out of the deity's mouth, despite not bearing any direct relationship to the scene. Another graffito has been inserted in the space between the sky line and the yellow inscription background. The longest graffito, however, figures in front of the libation water for the deceased royals in the kiosk, remarking, as it will be shown below, the predilection for leaving secondary inscriptions in scenes depicting ritual actions.

2.3 North walls

The long, continuous decoration on the north wall(s) is even more complex. Although there are no polychrome nor monumental inscriptions, a varied series of scripts, from less to more cursive, fills the wall. On one end, properly hieroglyphic inscriptions name the statues of Mentuhotep II and queen Neferu. Although their execution is already very simplified and mostly reduced to single brushstrokes, this choice is again indexical: hieroglyphs are necessary to address everything connected to the king. At the other extreme, various graffiti and captions written in hieratic take part in the decoration. In the middle between these two poles, however, at least two more types need to be mentioned. Firstly, an elegant cursive, the so-called 'literary cursive' (fig. 1, bottom, second from right; Inscriptions 4a–4b), used for a number of captions. Secondly, a more sketched cursive for the captions of the lower register as well as for two signatures, similar to that used for inscription drafts, but in black instead of in red ink (fig. 1 bottom, third and fourth from right; Inscriptions 5a–5b).

2.4 Niche

The central niche on the back wall shows not only different graphic registers, but also various stages of completion. Simplified polychrome hieroglyphs figure on the two vertical side inscriptions, which, curiously enough, were completed exactly up to the same point, leaving room to the preparatory drafts in the lower half of the columns, this time properly in red. The inscription on the lintel is written in very simple cursive hieroglyphs, prepared in red paint, but never overpainted in the usual final black.

32 Copy by Wilkinson: MMA 30.4.124.

2.5 Summary of graphic registers

Although much more precision would be needed in the definition of all the graphic registers present in the tomb, the inscriptions can be divided into three major groups, from more to less cursive: (1) hieroglyphs, (2) cursive scripts in their variety, (3) hieratic. A number of inscriptions also present mixed characteristics, with certain signs written in cursive hieroglyphs and others in hieratic, to the point where it is difficult to understand whether a difference between the two registers existed in the scribe's mind or not.

The three major types of script have different purposes. Use of monumental polychrome hieroglyphs is reserved, as mentioned, to the royal titulary of Amenhotep III and queen Tiy. The two longest hieroglyphic inscriptions, the religious and ritual texts found on the south-west wall and in the entrance, are instead in reduced polychrome hieroglyphs, as are (at least in part) the offering formulae delimiting the niche. Hieroglyphs therefore seem still to hold an essential connection to the formal religious context. Finally, monochrome hieroglyphs are also chosen for most of the captions. In fact, hieroglyphs still predominate in the general context of the tomb, making up 24 of the 50 inscriptions. However, the use of the other graphic registers seems to overlap with the use of hieroglyphs. Most of the cursive and hieratic inscriptions, despite being added at a later time to the original decoration, as they do not respect the most common formal choices of a tomb, are clearly meant as captions to the scene. This means that they try to fill in missing information that was considered necessary, this way carrying out the same role as the primary inscriptions, in addition to their purpose as witnesses of the scribe's personal interest in leaving their names. In the case of the hieratic inscriptions (18 in total), caption-style signatures are actually even more numerous (11) than proper, simple signatures (5), the textual genre for which this script typology is normally adopted. Hieratic is also used for two longer ritual inscriptions, one even reaching 13 lines and thus being the longest inscription in the tomb. Only 6 inscriptions – all captions or signature-captions, but longer than most hieratic texts – are written in sketched hieroglyphs, whereas the least represented graphic type is the literary cursive, used for only two (signature-?) captions. Finally, many of the secondary inscriptions are written in horizontal lines, instead of in columns, which again distinguishes them from the primary hieroglyphic inscriptions.

3 Hieratic, cursive-hieratic inscriptions

Setting aside the red, cursive drafts intended for the primary inscriptions, and therefore clearly ascribable to the first phase of work in the tomb, this paper focuses on

some of the hieratic, cursive, and mixed inscriptions, which appear mostly to be related to each other and to complete the decoration. Two categories of 'secondary' inscriptions will be analysed presently. A group of inscriptions playing between the role of signatures and of 'secondary' captions; and selected 'pure' signatures left by the priests of Ptah-Sokar or in general by figures active in the temple of Amenhotep III. In both cases, however, the inscriptions' location and orthography show how consciously and purposely their authors interacted with the decoration.

3.1 Hieratic inscriptions

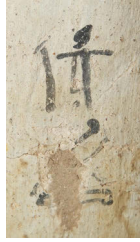
3.1.1 Inscription 1a-1b

On the north wall, the representation of the goddess of the West presents, just in front of her emblem, a caption with her name (fig. 2). The position of the goddess is very precise: she appears just before the break in the wall (left open) leading to the burial chamber, as a clear indication of the entrance to the underworld, as well as welcoming the deceased back into the womb of the mountain and to his new life. The fact that this inscription is in black and not in red gives reason to believe that it was not intended as a draft for a hieroglyphic inscription, but that it was intended as final.³³ Behind its composition might therefore have been a scribe who considered hieratic either more familiar or bearing a specific ritual or identity value, but who nonetheless wanted to leave his contribution to the completion of the tomb.

On the north wall again, in the register below the goddess of the West, the depiction of the harpist also features a hieratic inscription, but in a more delimited space, that is, between the man's arms (fig. 3). In this case, the inscription seems to be the signature of a singer. Despite only one line of the text being preserved, more were still visible to Vandier: the second line, in particular, would specify that a singer of Ptah-Sokar is represented here.³⁴ In this case, it would be another member of the priestly community of Ptah-Sokar, to which Amenemnet belongs. The choice of the place for a signature would surely make sense in connection to the figure of the singing harpist: the singer would have therefore inserted himself in the decoration of the tomb by making use of the depictions already present.

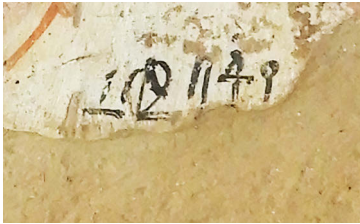
33 Ragazzoli 2016, 227 reaches the same conclusion.

34 Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, pl. 8.



Position: North wall, east part
Type: caption
Text (column): *Jmn.t wr.(t)*

Fig. 2: Inscription 1a. Hieratic caption in front of the goddess of the West (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)



Position: North wall, east part
Type: 'signature-caption'
Text (lines): (1) *ḥs(w) n* (2) [*Ptḥ-ḥkr*]

Fig. 3: Inscription 1b. 'Signature-caption' of a singer of Ptah-Sokar, inserted between the hands of a harpist (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)

3.1.2 Inscriptions 2a–2d

The most inscriptions identifiable as 'secondary' figure in the two central registers on the North wall, where the performance of the burial rituals is shown (see also 3.2.1. and 3.2.2.; fig 4, table 1). However, as mentioned, in many cases it is challenging to understand whether an inscription is intended as signature or as caption, in particular when written in literary cursive. The definition of secondary therefore appears problematic, as it seems as if these inscriptions are not simply done for their author's sake, but also to contribute to finishing the incomplete decoration, for the deceased's sake.

Among these inscriptions, many belong to other members of the priesthood of Sokar or of Amenhotep III, and could therefore refer to colleagues of the deceased.

In one case, the mentioned person is a *sem* priest of the temple of Sokar (fig. 5a). As before, it is almost difficult to distinguish clearly between an inscription intended as caption and one intended as signature. The author of the inscription clearly played with this ambiguity, and once again fit his own name in a perfectly corresponding picture, that of the *sem* priest purifying the offerings. The same is done by a scribe named Piay (fig. 5b), who inserts his name just below, in front of the figure

Hieratic in the tomb of Ameneminet (TT 277)

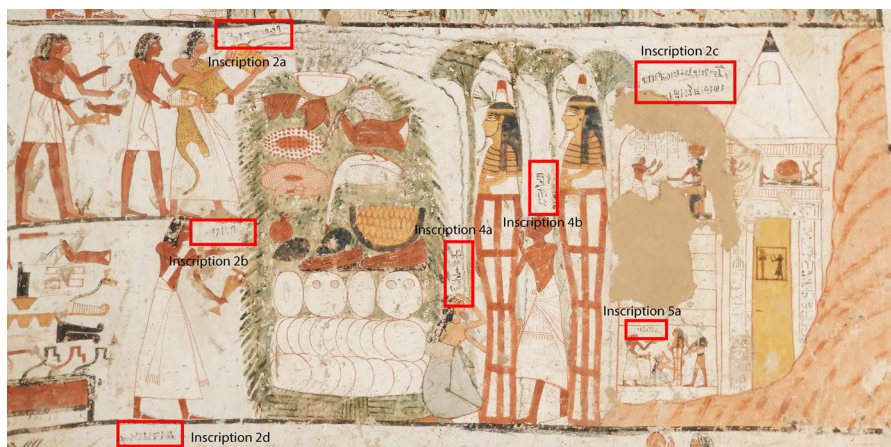
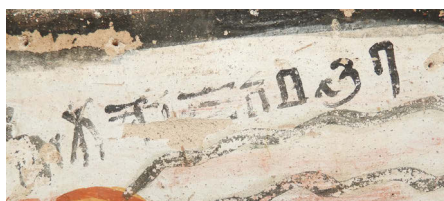
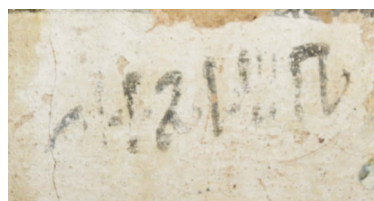


Fig. 4: TT 277, North wall. Cluster of secondary inscriptions in the ritual scenes in front of the mummy (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)



Position: North wall, centre
 Type: 'signature-caption'
 Text (line): *sm (n) ḥw.t Zkry Mnw-ms*

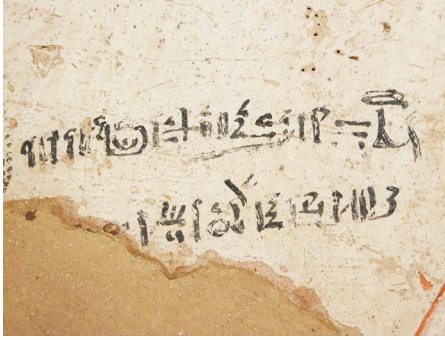


Position: North wall, centre
 Type: 'signature-caption'
 Text (line): *sš Pj:y*

Fig. 5a–b: Inscription 2a–2b. 'Signature-captions' of the *sem* priest Minmes (left) and of the scribe Pj:y (right) (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)

of an incensing priest, who would have otherwise remained anonymous among the innumerable religious figures on the wall.

More immediately understandable as a signature is the inscription of a *wab* priest also named Pj:y, since it is not strictly connected to a figure, but rather seems to be almost hanging on top of the depiction of the funerary stela (fig. 6). However, it confirms a predilection to leaving signatures in scenes that display ritual actions, as well as the social consistency of the secondary inscriptions' authors.

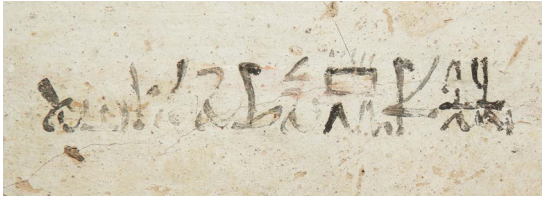


Position: North wall, centre

Type: signature

Text (lines): (1) *wꜥ jt-nꜥr n(y) tꜥ ḥw.t*
nswt Nb-mꜥ.t-Rꜥ ꜥ.w.s. (2) *m pr Jmn ḥr*
*Wꜥs.t Pꜣjꜣy dd n.f sꜥ Jmn-m-jp.t*³⁵

Fig. 6: Inscription 2c. Signature of the *wab* priest and god's father Piay, above the depiction of the funerary stela (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)



Position: North wall, centre

Type: signature (prayer)

Text (line): *(n) kꜥ n šmꜥyt (J)mn*
tꜥ-ḥꜣrw(.t)

Fig. 7: Inscription 2d. Signature of the chantress of Amun Takhareṯ (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)

Similarly more recognizable as proper signature, given its opening formula (present only in this case), is the graffito left “for the ka of the chantress of Amun, Takhareṯ” (fig. 7). Amenemineṯ’s wife, Nefertari, was also a chantress of Amun, so that again this graffito seems to belong to the same community. In addition, despite the stronger separation between primary and secondary created by the opening (an offering formula for the sake of a person different from the tomb owner) this inscription shows the same strong connection to the depictions as the other signatures. It figures in front of a lamenting woman, and again, as in the last three cases, it is placed almost precisely below the register line, in order to give a formal appearance to the text.

35 Vandier d’Abbadie 1954, pl. 12 shows more than what is visible today.

3.1.3 Inscriptions 3a–3b

This type of ‘framed graffiti’, as Chloe Ragazzoli has defined them,³⁶ is present also on the south wall. That these are proper signatures is confirmed by their position, as they name individuals that do not correspond to the figures depicted nor to the scene context. One signature is exactly framed by the blue colour band of the sky on top and by the yellow background of the planned inscriptions on the bottom (fig. 8); the second has been placed in front of the god Shu (fig. 9). However, they both belong to more members of the priesthood of Amenhotep III, and specifically two *wab* priests, who, according to Den Doncker, could/may have even known the deceased.³⁷



Position: South wall, west part

Type: signature

Text (line): *wꜥ sš Pth-m-ḥb n(y) tꜥ ḥw.t nswt Nb-mꜥ.t-Rꜥ ꜥ. w. s.*

Fig. 8: Inscription 3a. Signature of the *wab* priest Ptahemheb (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)



Position: South wall, west part

Type: signature

Text (line): *wꜥ Pḥty n(y) tꜥ ḥw.t nswt Nb-mꜥ.t-Rꜥ*

Fig. 9: Inscription 3b. Signature of the *wab* priest Pehty (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)

The signatures therefore appear consistent in their context. A large proportion – 5 out of 8 – belong to members of the priesthood of Sokar and of the temple of Amenhotep III, that is, all people related to the same social milieu of Ameneminet. One, instead, belongs to a chantress of Amun, therefore related to the working environment of Ameneminet’s wife. These individuals not only leave their names, for

³⁶ Ragazzoli 2013, 274.

³⁷ Den Doncker 2012, 24 and n. 15.

the sake of benefiting from the power of the depicted figures, but by adding their signature-captions, they implement the incomplete decoration, as is also shown by the choice to caption the goddess of the West, who would have already been otherwise recognizable by her emblem.

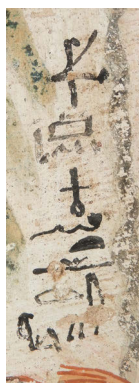
3.2 Cursive, mixed cursive-hieratic inscriptions

3.2.1 Literary cursive captions (Inscriptions 4a–4b)

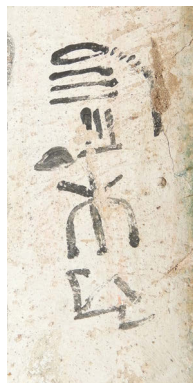
Although not properly hieratic, these two inscriptions are remarkable for a number of reasons. They are written in an elegant cursive, the so-called literary cursive, and they report the names of the ‘chantress of Amun, Nefertari’ on the left (fig. 10a), and of a ‘wab priest Ptahmes’ on the right (fig. 10b). The first would fit perfectly as a caption of the depiction, as usually the woman lamenting at the feet of the mummy is the wife of the deceased, in this case precisely the chantress of Amun, Nefertari. However, this type of script is not used in any other part of the tomb; in addition, the mention of a *wab* priest, so close to the other signatures of *wab* priests, would almost hint at an inscription of the latter sort. Again, it would appear as if the secondary inscriptions are secondary only in a temporary sense, and not in purpose. The people of the inner circle of Ameneminet tried to fill in the gaps in the inscriptions by also adding themselves in the process, as an act of friendly piety. The choice of a different graphic register, among all the other secondary captions written in hieratic, probably hints at the desire to have the writer’s identity stand out from the rest – maybe even show a more elegant penmanship. In fact, these are the most formal among the ‘secondary’ inscriptions, as they are also written in columns, instead of in lines like the majority of the others. This could surely be due to reasons of space, but it nonetheless reflects an awareness towards the official hieroglyphic captions found on the rest of the north wall.

3.2.2 Sketched hieroglyph inscriptions (Inscriptions 5a–5b)

To add to the variety of graphic registers, we also find two inscriptions in sketched hieroglyphs, both mentioning a man called Piay – in one case again a *wab* priest and divine father, just like Ameneminet (fig. 11b). Their presence in a mostly hieratic context is again quite surprising, and clearly points to a different agency behind it. The first inscription has been added in the miniature meta-scene on the stone stela depicted behind the two mummies (fig. 11a). In this case, the choice to add a caption in hieroglyphs, despite the quick writing style, might represent the effort to



Position: North wall, centre
 Type: caption
 Text (column): *šm:yt Nfr.t-jry*

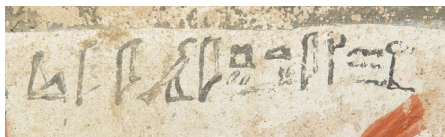


Position: North wall, centre
 Type: caption
 Text (column): *w^b Pt<h>-ms*

Fig. 10a–b: Inscriptions 4a–4b. ‘Signature-captions’ in literary cursive: of the chantress of Amun Nefertari (left) and of the *wab* priest Ptahmes (right) (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)



Position: North wall, centre
 Type: (signature?) caption
 Text (line): *p? Pyjy*



Position: North wall, centre
 Type: (signature?) caption
 Text (line): *w^b jt-ntr Pyjy*

Fig. 11a–b: Inscriptions 5a–5b. ‘Signature-captions’ in sketched hieroglyphs, both mentioning a man called Piay (© Universität Basel/LHHT; photo: Marina Sartori)

fit in within the context of the stela, filled with (though little detailed) hieroglyphic inscriptions.

The second inscription, instead, appears more idiosyncratic, especially since it identifies the figure directly following the incensing priest captioned in hieratic as ‘the scribe Piay’ (Inscription 2b). This could probably hint at the will to again distinguish the writer from the homonymous person who had added his name to the figure in front. Whether this second Piay is the same *wab* priest and divine father who left the hieratic inscription on top of the stela (Inscription 2c) remains unclear.

3.2.3 Mixed use of sketched hieroglyphs and hieratic in captions to the same scene

Two other cases underscore this mixture of scripts all aimed at completing the decoration. The lower register depicts a series of banquet scenes. In the centre, captions to the figures have been added quite hastily in a sketched way. The style of the script is reminiscent of the draft inscriptions on ostraca, for example, and it also shows elements in hieratic, such as the name of Amun (fig. 12a). On the same register, at the extreme right, four female figures are shown attending the banquet, but their names have this time been added in hieratic (fig. 12b). This use, on the same register, of cursive and hieratic to express captions to the same scene is clearly remarkable, as it expresses the will to distinguish oneself through the choice of different graphic registers. Despite this, a perfect cohesion in Amenemint's world is confirmed by the fact that, aside from the deceased and his family, only other *wab* priests of Ptah are attending the banquet.³⁸



Position: North wall, bottom register, centre and east part
Type: captions

Fig. 12a–b: Captions in sketched hieroglyphs with hieratic elements (left) coexist on the bottom register of the North wall with purely hieratic captions, written in a much hastier way than other secondary inscriptions (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)

³⁸ Vandier d'Abbadie 1954, 10.

4 On the agency and context of the ‘secondary’ inscriptions

4.1 Ritual and social context

This overview has shown that secondary inscriptions clearly belong to the same social world as the primary ones, and they appear to fulfil a duty dictated by personal friendship and religious piety. Ragazzoli has suggested that they could therefore have been added either already at the time of the funeral or during other rituals.³⁹ In fact, the preferred location of most of the analysed inscriptions is in the context of ritual scenes, as table 1 shows, or in connection to gods.⁴⁰ The majority relates to priests incensing or pouring libations on either the mummy or the offerings; to the lamenting women and to the priests taking care of the mummy or reading the liturgy from a papyrus. The two inscriptions on the south wall are closely related to the depictions of gods, whereas the longer inscription added on top of the painted stela could be connected to the religious text in honour of Ra-Harakhte present on the stela itself. Finally, also the two longer texts, not analysed in the paper, are positioned in two extremely important ritual scenes: the libation offered by Ameneminet to the royal figures in the kiosk, and the transport of the mummy. The predilection for ritual context would confirm the affirmation by Donnat⁴¹ that the use of hieratic is embedded in ritual practice.

However, hieratic does not only play a ritual role. Ragazzoli has shown the important role that hieratic inscriptions take in monumental context as an identity marker.⁴² The use of hieratic is indexical to the social status and training of the people who wrote them, specifically the members of the priesthood of the temple. This is evident in TT 277, where the writers of the secondary inscriptions had in mind the purpose to complete the decoration, yet they did not do so in the proper hieroglyphs expected in a tomb, but in the script they were most used to or that they considered most important to display their identity. This set them apart from the rest of the decoration, making their work stand out to the visitors of the tomb. The variety of different solutions (sketched hieroglyphs with hieratic elements, pure hieratic, literary cursive) in fact hints at the presence of more people animated by the

39 Ragazzoli 2016, 227. This type of ‘secondary’ epigraphic activity, difficult to distinguish from the ‘primary’ one, and also mostly connected to ritual scenes, has a strong parallel in the tombs of the Old Kingdom nomarchs in Meir, see Hassan and Ragazzoli, *in preparation*. In addition, relatives and friends of the deceased had various occasions, such as the numerous festivals in the Necropolis, to visit the tomb: Hartwig 2004, 10–15.

40 Den Doncker 2013, 24, reaches the same conclusion, though with focus only on the private signatures.

41 Donnat 2014, 230–231.

42 Ragazzoli 2016, 22–28.



Table 1. Location within the tomb of the analysed secondary inscriptions and figures mentioned


Inscription	Script	People mentioned	Location
1a	Hieratic	N/A	In front of the goddess of the West
1b	Hieratic	'the singer of Ptah-Sokar'	Between the arms of the harpist
2a	Hieratic	'the <i>sem</i> priest of the temple of Sokar Minmes'	In front of <i>sem</i> priest offering libation to the mummies
2b	Hieratic	'the scribe Piay'	In front of man incensing and purifying the pile of offerings
2c	Hieratic	'the <i>wab</i> priest, god's father in the temple of king Nebmaatre, in the house of Amun in Thebes Piay [called Ameneminet]	Above depiction of the painted funerary stela
2d	Hieratic	'the chantress of Amun Takharet'	In front of lamenting woman
3a	Hieratic	'the <i>wab</i> priest and scribe Ptahemheb of the temple of king Nebmaatre'	Between register lines in scene of worshipping (Shu and Tefnut)
3b	Hieratic	'the <i>wab</i> priest Pehty of the temple of king Nebmaatre'	In front of the face of the god Shu
4a	Literary cursive	'the chantress of Amun Nefertari'	Above the head of a lamenting woman, in front of the mummy
4b	Literary cursive	'the <i>wab</i> priest Ptahmes'	Above the head of a priest taking care of the mummy
5a	Sketched hieroglyphs	'Piay'	In front of man incensing and purifying the mummy, meta-scene on the depicted stela (cf. Inscription 2b)
5b	Sketched hieroglyphs	'the <i>wab</i> priest, god's father, Piay'	In front of priest reciting from a papyrus

same purpose, leaving their own imprint in the commemoration of their colleague or relative. The presence of the sketched hieroglyphs shows that at least some of the priests were more or less familiar also with this script, making them use a different graphic register in order to distinguish their contribution from the others. The respective choice of a different type of script clearly appears to be a statement.

Another fil rouge of these ‘secondary’ inscriptions is the name Piay. Five inscriptions (hieratic inscriptions 2b–2c, sketched hieroglyphs inscriptions 5a–5b and a monochrome hieroglyphic caption on the North-west wall)⁴³ mention a person with this name. The first, the primary caption in hieroglyphs, relates to a *wab* priest Piay, son of a *sem* priest Usermontu, again from the temple of Amenhotep III. This person, however, also bears the epithet of ‘justified’, which makes him unidentifiable with any of the authors of the secondary inscriptions. Two other inscriptions in sketched hieroglyphs mention the name, the first a *wab* priest and divine father Piay, and the second a simple Piay. Finally, the two hieratic signatures belong to a scribe Piay and to another *wab* priest and divine father. Although Piay is of course a very common name during the New Kingdom, the connection among these signatures is impossible to ignore. They are all clustered together, and they again mostly belong to *wab* priests; clearly, we are dealing here with a strongly cohesive community, with a deep sense of identity and emulation. It is remarkable, for example, that the two simplest inscriptions are even located in two perfectly comparable scenes: right near the head of a priest incensing and offering libations.

4.2 Orthographic variants and palaeography of single signs

The agency of most of these inscriptions therefore seems very consistent. A certain consistency is also present in the spelling. For example, the title of *wab* priest is often spelled with a combination of the Gardiner signs W54 (, pouring jar) and N35a (, three water ripples). This is the case not only in the few certain primary inscriptions, but also in some of the secondary ones, such as the inscription of the *wab* priest Ptahmes and of the sketched hieroglyph captions in the banquet scene on the lower register (fig. 13). To be precise, this variant is present only on the north wall, and on the north entrance thickness. If we consider that these inscriptions were added to complete the missing information on the scene, it is remarkable that the writers tried to fit in with the rest of the decoration by taking inspiration from the other completed inscriptions present on the wall.

The spelling with the sign Gardiner D60 (, instead, is present in primary inscriptions of the south wall, of the niche, and of the outer doorjambs, while figuring as well in various hieratic graffiti (fig. 14). Remarkably, whereas the former sign

⁴³ Vandier d’Abbadie 1954, pl. 10.



Fig. 13: Examples of the spelling of the word ‘wab’ through the combination of Gardiner signs W54 and N35a (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)



Fig. 14: Examples of alternative orthography of the word ‘wab’ through the Gardiner sign D60 (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)

showed less variety in its rendition, the D60 sign appears extremely changeable, to the point that there are no two overlapping versions. From the point of view of the visual study of the script, this exemplifies perfectly how difficult it is to find a proper definition for all these different renditions, and how individual they can be.

On the contrary, some signs can be visually less manipulated than others are, and maintain common characteristics throughout the various graphic registers (fig. 15). Although for example the Gardiner sign V28 (𓄀) appears much different in hieratic, the other versions of the sign seem quite consistent throughout the tomb: all present a big loop on top and a single vertical line with diverging ends at the bottom. The example of the Gardiner F35 sign (𓄁), instead, shows perfectly the evolution from “painted” to “purely written”. If the polychrome hieroglyph has already lost much of the fine inner details found in the same sign during the 18th dynasty, and is now reduced to simple patches of colour, the next step in the simplification of the sign is to avoid completely filling in the single parts. Writing is no longer painting, but simply tracing a line with the ink.

Hieratic in the tomb of Ameneminet (TT 277)

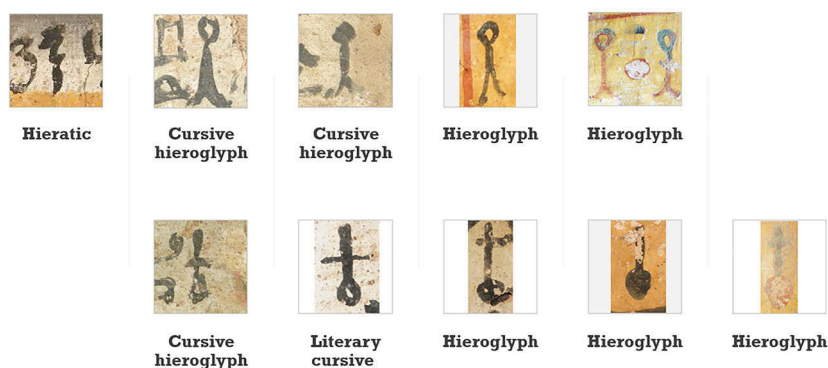


Fig. 15: Palaeographic examples of the Gardiner signs V28 (top) and F35 (bottom) (© Universität Basel/LHTT; photo: Marina Sartori)

5 Conclusions

The tomb of Ameneminet is a very complex monument, where script typologies mingle even in the same inscription genre and sometimes even within the same inscription. The secondary inscriptions take on the role not of simple signatures, but of captions to the figures and characters. They can take the form of sketched hieroglyphs, literary cursive or hieratic script, sometimes even in the same wall register. The choice of a different graphic register to leave one's own mark is a clear statement of identity and an index of the desire to stand out from the other inscriptions.

In fact, more than anything, the tomb is a *lieu de mémoire collective*, as Ragazzoli⁴⁴ and Verhoeven⁴⁵ have concluded also for TT 60 and for tomb N13.1 in Asyut, respectively. The inscriptions show a strongly cohesive community of priests connected to the temple of Amenhotep III and to the cult of Ptah-Sokar, to which Ameneminet belongs and which is bonded by a deep sense of identity. Even more so, epigraphy seems to be one of the social activities that bind the community together.⁴⁶ This community not only wants to be remembered, and to benefit from the power of the tomb depictions. It also contributes to the completion of the tomb, trying to fill in the gaps where important information is missing, and even trying to fit in with the 'writing style' of the original tomb inscription by adopting specific spellings, as in the case of the word 'wab'. The inscriptions are perfectly included in the decoration and respond to each other, as is the case of the signatures bearing the name of 'Piay'. Two of these inscriptions are located in the same posi-

⁴⁴ Ragazzoli 2013.

⁴⁵ Verhoeven 2012; Verhoeven 2020, 323.

⁴⁶ Ragazzoli, personal communication.

tion in two almost identical scenes, thus confirming the sense of emulation characterizing this closed group.

If they were indeed colleagues of the deceased, one could even talk of a sort of “friendly piety.” This is also supported by the predilection of the writers to leave their mark in scenes displaying ritual actions, especially those connected to the funerary rites. The funeral might have therefore been precisely the occasion in which the colleagues of the deceased immortalized their presence and contributed to it. The next steps in the investigation will be a thorough study of the palaeography and of the language used in the tomb, to recognize possible hands and establish a relative chronology of the inscriptions.

In addition, due to the high amount of graphic variety, the tomb of Ameneinet offers an incredible amount of material to analyse how the ancient Egyptians exploited the visual possibilities of each sign and the interaction and evolution between the different scripts and sub-scripts. Some signs appear to be more unstable than others, meaning they can be manipulated in very different ways, underlining the level of arbitrariness present in the script. At the same time, TT 277 represents the perfect example of the Ramesside shift from the “picture writing” that characterized the extremely detailed inscriptions of the 18th dynasty tombs, to the properly “written”.

Concluding, when we look at the enormous variety of graphic registers present in the tomb, we are faced with the difficulty of defining a proper scale. “Cursive” seems to be too generic a term, as we have at least three different subtypes of “cursive” in just this tomb. The study is therefore still ongoing, and will be aimed at completing a full typology of the various scripts present in the analysed Theban tombs, a typology that will do justice to the diversity of such a visual writing system.

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