The Messy Scribe from Deir el-Medina

A Paleographical Journey through the Texts of a Draughtsman and Scribe from the 19th Dynasty: Pay (i)

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Abstract. This paper gathers a number of texts that it argues were written by a single scribe from Deir el-Medina who lived during the first half of the 19th Dynasty and who was active mostly during the reign of Ramesses II. The identification of these texts takes as its point of departure the archeological context of ‘Maison G/J’, situated north of the Ptolemaic temple and to the east of the Grand Puits. Based on paleographic, orthographic, and thematic evidence, the paper shows that this scribe wrote a series of hymns to Amun that are expressive of a vivid personal piety. By correlating certain features of this scribe’s handwriting, it further argues that the same scribe was also responsible for hymns addressed to the deities Mut, Taweret, and Iaret, as well as for a hymn to Thebes. Outside of the literary realm, the same hand is attested in administrative documents, including letters that allow us to situate the scribe in question within a family of draughtsmen. The paper identifies this polygraph as Pay (i) – the first of this line of draughtsmen from Deir el-Medina – to whom dozens of hieratic texts can be attributed.

Keywords. Deir el-Medina, handwriting, draughtsman, scribe, author, 19th Dynasty, Pay (i)

1. Introduction

Jaroslav Černý queried[1] “[w]hether, and how far it will be possible to classify the variety of hands occurring in the documents of the Tomb, and to link the handwritings to individual scribes”. The present paper aims to provide a first answer to these questions, delegated by Černý to future scholars, though the pitfalls attendant upon such an endeavor are well-known. There is, on the one hand, the significant degree of variation[3] – both synchronic[4] and diachronic[5] – that can be observed within the hieratic texts of a single hieratic hand, depending on the medium and written registers.[6] And conversely, the resemblances between hands of the same period, which allow us to date witnesses based on paleographic features,[7] are actually a hindrance when one wishes to single out an individual hand.[8] Finally, the difficulties in attributing specific hands to particular scribes are substantial when compositions are not accompanied by colophons[9] or ‘signatures’.[10]

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Despite these complications, recent years have witnessed major progress in the field. Clusters of documents written by specific hands have been identified and a number of texts have been attributed to individual scribes. Crucially, these studies do not rely solely on paleographic features – whether on the level of isolated signs or on the broader level of ligatures, words, and even entire phrases – but complement the identification of these essential features with observations about the provenance of the inscribed objects, their genre (journals, letters, hymns, etc.) and date of composition (usually based on prosopographic information), and the layout and general appearance of the texts. These multiple factors are always intertwined to an extent, and it can be difficult to find a satisfactory way to present all of the data and the reasoning that lie behind the identification of a specific hand.

In the present case, after careful deliberation, I decided that the most efficient way to convey my (highly provisional) reconstruction of the body of texts written by the ‘messy polygraph’ from Deir el-Medina was to tell a story – the story of my own journey through places, collections, and essays that led to my current understanding of this scribe’s dossier. Rather than a rational account of the paleographic, diplomatic, orthographic, linguistic, and stylistic features of the writings of this scribe, presented en bloc, I hope the reader will bear with me as I trace the steps that led me to cluster together dozens of texts written in Deir el-Medina during the 19th Dynasty and to attribute these texts to a single scribe.

2. A first encounter:
   La Maison ‘G’ (or ‘J’) as a point of departure

In recent years, archeological context has increasingly been taken into account in philological analyses of written materials from the community of Deir el-Medina. Annie Gasse and Andreas Dorn, for example, have demonstrated the kind of results that can be achieved when one takes into consideration the provenance of Ramesside ostraca from Western Thebes, while Hans van den Berg and Koen Donker van Heel have shown that archeological data can be a valuable point of departure for grouping texts written by the same hand. Stimulated by these findings, Andreas Dorn and I proposed to prepare for publication some literary ostraca from Deir el-Medina based on their specific find-sites within the village. Drawing upon the marks used by the excavators, we set out to investigate those ostraca stamped with ‘Maison G’ and ‘K 290’, two locations north of the village, on the northern and southern side of the Ptolemaic temple respectively. Several ostraca found in these two places

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12 van den Berg & Donker van Heel 2000; Donker van Heel & Haring 2003, 39–82; McClain 2018.
15 In the present case, I wondered whether I should even publish the data at all, knowing that I could in truth deal only with the tip of the iceberg within the framework of an article.
16 Annex 1 represents a table of the ostraca (detailing their text genres and provenances) that are firmly attributed to the ‘messy polygraph’ in the framework of this study. The corpus is preliminary; I do not intend to list here all the published texts written by this scribe, as other witnesses to this hand are currently being gathered and form part of a larger endeavor whose scope far exceeds the limits of this paper.
17 Gasse 2000.
18 Dorn 2011.
19 van den Berg & Donker van Heel 2000.
turned out to have been written by the same distinctive hand; these stimulated my interest in this scribe and his idiosyncratic writing habits.\textsuperscript{20}

‘Maison G’ is the name given by Bernard Bruyère in his \textit{Journal} of the 1946–1947 excavation season (p. 6, left) to a three-room structure (G, G', G'' in Fig. 1) which he identified as a house. The structure is located between Chapel F and Chapel G, five meters south-east of the ramp leading to Chapel G, in proximity to the Grand Puits. It was excavated between the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} of January 1947 (Fig. 1, blue) and was later renamed ‘Maison J’,\textsuperscript{21} evidently to avoid confusions with the aforementioned Chapel.

Fig. 1. Maison G/J in Bruyère’s Journal (MS_2004_0163_011)

Among the hieratic ostraca found within Maison G/J\textsuperscript{22} was an intact prayer to Amun (O. IFAO inv. 2181). This was published by Georges Posener in a paper entitled ‘Amon juge du pauvre’ (Fig. 2).\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} The results of my and Dorn’s research will be presented in a volume of the \textit{DFIFAO}. In the present paper, I focus exclusively on documents that have been published.
\textsuperscript{21} Bruyère 1952, 33–34, pl. I & VI, left.
\textsuperscript{22} See already Bruyère 1952, pl. XII–XIV.
\textsuperscript{23} Posener 1971.
Fig. 2. Doc. A = O. IFAO inv. 2181 (© Ifao, Archives)24

Posener connected this ostracon to another ostracon bought in Western Thebes by Ludwig Borchardt, which he knew from a photograph given to him by Černý (Fig. 3).25 He established the link between the ostraca on thematic grounds26 – both texts are intercessory prayers to Amun on behalf of the poor at a tribunal27 – though he also noted the resemblance between the handwriting on the two ostraca.28

Fig. 3. Doc. B = O. Borchardt (© Ifao, Archives)

24 Throughout this paper, I use photographs whenever possible and resort to black and white facsimiles when the quality of the photographs at my disposal is not sufficient or the ink too faint to allow for proper paleographical assessments.
25 Curiously, this document is now part of the IFAO collections, though its detailed history is not recorded.
26 Note the intertextual connection discussed by Posener with O. Wilson (Wilson 1933) = O. BM EA 29559 (Demarée 2002, pl. 86–87; formerly numbered 5656a). The handwriting on O. Wilson shares several features with the hand of the ‘messy scribe’, but nonetheless looks decidedly different.
28 Posener 1971, 61.
Indeed, there is not much doubt that the two texts were penned by the same scribe, as they share most (if not all) paleographical features:

- The hand is untidy and smudged, characterized by “un pinceau défectueux et une encre trop épaisse”. The ductus is fast, with round but jerky movements, and lacks precision. Also very noticeable is the variation in terms of ink density that characterizes this hand: from dark black to light grey, the quantity of ink varies significantly from sign to sign, and traces of dipping are clearly visible throughout the texts.

- In terms of layout, interlinear spacing is limited (corresponding globally to less than half the height of the written line). Horizontal spacing between signs (‘kerning’) is small, with occasional overlaps between individual signs (Table 1a, a–b), a phenomenon which scribes usually tend to avoid. These features contribute to the crowded appearance of this scribe’s texts. Note that the signs inside a line quite often progress upwards in a stair-like fashion (Table 1a, c–d) before returning to the baseline.

- Spelling habits and the ductus of entire words are also shared by the two texts. One may compare, for instance, the words nmḥ ‘poor’ (Table 1a, d; 1b, a–b) and knb.t ‘tribunal’ (Table 1b, c–d) that occur on both ostraca.

- Zooming down to the level of individual groups of signs and signs, the following features shared by the two documents can be observed. The group mn is quite distinctive, with a squarish form and a large (dotted) loop on top (Table 1c, a–b). The definite article pꜣ is distinctive as well (Table 1c, c–d): the wings of the pꜣ-bird are drawn as two small converging strokes, and the following aleph is tall and may be almost as high as the pꜣ-bird. The ש sign is yet another ‘marker’ of this hand (Table 1c, e–i): the

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29 Posener 1971, 59.
31 O. Gardiner 45 (= HO 8.2) is also an appeal to Amun for help, made by a man standing in front of the court. It will not be analyzed here, but the spelling of knb.t is identical to the spelling in Docs. A and B, and it shares the paleographical features identified here. It was most probably written by the same scribe. See already Posener (1971, 61), who remarked that it was “inscrit par une main qui ressemble à [O. IFAO inv. 2181]”.
32 I focus here on a selection of paleographical commonalities, but other key features of the hand that are attested in these texts will be discussed in the following sections.
strokes representing the ‘hand to the mouth’ and ‘legs’ are drawn in the upper part of the sign, while the vertical stroke – which stands for the body – extends downwards, not infrequently below the baseline. Finally, note the shape ( \( \text{\textcopyright} \) ) that the hieratic can take, for instance, in Table 1c (j) in the words nb.t and mḥ.t, as well as the frequent highly abbreviated form of \( \text{\textcopyright} \) as a simple dot, as in Table 1c (h).

![Images of hieroglyphs](a) A,5 (b) B,1 (c) A,3 (d) B,1 (e) A,1 (f) A,4 (g) A,8 (h) B,1 (i) B,2 (j) A,1

Table 1c. Paleographical features of Doc. A & B (part 3)

Besides the paleographical features discussed above, three spellings from Doc. A are worth observing at this point. First, the 2sg.m independent pronoun is written \( \text{
\textcopyright} \) (A,2, A,8) – like a conjunctive with the 2sg.m suffix pronoun – rather than \( \text{
\textcopyright} \) (or the like), as is usually the case in hieratic texts of the New Kingdom. The negative relative jwjty is spelled phonographically \( \text{
\textcopyright} \) (A,5), with a classifier borrowed from the homophone jdt ‘to suffer’, and the verb dm ‘to pronounce’ (A, 7–8) is written \( \text{
\textcopyright} \) without the \( \text{
\textcopyright} \)-classifier (see Doc. C, r4), a spelling which is not exceptional for this verb in New Kingdom hieratic. We shall see throughout this paper that such non-standard orthographies are quite typical of this scribe.

3. Amun leads the way: hymns by the same hand

If one is willing to accept the conclusion of Section 2, namely that Docs. A and B were most likely written by the same scribe, there are different avenues to be explored when it comes to identifying other texts by the same hand. The most obvious path might be thematic. Because this scribe appears to have been an adherent of Amun, it is possible to hypothesize that other hymns and prayers to this god from Deir el-Medina might have been penned by him. And indeed, there are several other religious compositions on ostraca from Deir el-Medina that invoke Amun as the main divinity, and these are – beyond reasonable doubt – by the same scribe.
Fig. 4a. Doc. C, $r^\circ = 0$. Fitzwilliam Museum E.GA.6134.1943, $r^\circ$ (©Fredrik Hagen)

Fig. 4b. Doc. C, $v^\circ = 0$. Fitzwilliam Museum E.GA.6134.1943, $v^\circ$ (©Fredrik Hagen)
The most striking case – the easiest to identify and attribute to this hand – is probably O. Fitzwilliam Museum E.GA.6134.1943. The two-fold hymn to Amun features a prayer to Amun on the recto, and describes the beneficial effects that the god has on his follower on the verso. Both faces of the ostracon reflect the paleographical features discussed above, from the global down to the specific. Besides the overall appearance of the hand (which will not be discussed further below, except in cases when it deviates significantly from previous observations), especially noteworthy are the lines that progress like stairs (passim); frequent horizontal overlaps between signs (Table 2a, a–c), with a neat increase of the text density on the verso; the form of Jmn ‘Amun’, with the squarish, non-ligatured, and dotted mn (Table 2a, d–f); the shape of the pi, usually with a tall : (Table 2a, g–h); and the sign, with the hands and feet positioned particularly high on the body stroke (Table 2a, i–j). Note that we can also observe variants or allographs of the same signs: the ligature for dr has a broad and narrow variant (Table 2a, k vs. l), while šw can be written both without (usual) and with (once) the two diacritic strokes (Table 2a, c and m vs. n).

![Images of ostraca and signs](image)

(a) C,r1
(b) C,r5
(c) C,v1
(d) C,r1
(e) C,r3
(f) C,v1
(g) C,r4
(h) C,v1
(i) C,v2
(j) C,v2
(k) C,r2
(l) C,r5
(m) C,r1
(n) C,r3

Table 2a. Paleographical features of Doc. C (part 1)

These paleographical arguments can be further corroborated by noting the scribe’s spelling habits and phraseological choices. The hymn opens with an invocation to Amun as a solar deity.

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34 In Table 2a, a & c, note the almost complete overlap between the feather šw and the : of the pi-bird. Though this could indicate a scribal correction (Hagen 2011, 35), it is actually a habit of this scribe, and it appears especially after he dipped his pen (see already Doc. B,3). In recto 3, emend the edition to , the confusion deriving from overlapping signs.
35 The signs above the first line must have been erased on purpose and may have represented (something similar to) jb-ḥr.t in l. 1 (probably not dwi Jmn, as previously understood). The irregularities of the writing surface on the top right produced a series of ugly sign shapes that the scribe erased before starting anew on the flat surface below. A such, I number l. 2 in the edition here as l. 1.
and reads\(^{(36)}\) \((C,r1)\): “Thinking in the rising sun: Amun, for sure, you are the one rising!” As stressed by Hagen,\(^{(37)}\) the spelling \(\text{ jb-ḫr.t m } \text{ pi šw wbn } \text{ Jmn jst ntk wbn } \) must to be the 2SG.M independent pronoun in this context, just as in \(A,2\) and \(A,8\), used here as subject of a cleft-sentence.\(^{(38)}\) The spelling thus plays a role in the attribution of this hymn to the ‘messy scribe’. In terms of common phraseological choices, one can observe the construction \(\text{ pi dm (nb) } \text{ rn=k } \) ‘the one who/whoever invokes your name’ (both \(A,7–8\) and \(C,r4\)).

![Images of papyri and hieroglyphs](image)

(a) C,r2  
(b) C,v2  
(c) C,r5  
(d) C,r3  
(e) C,v1  
(f) C,r1  
(g) C,v3

Table 2b. Paleographical features of Doc. C (part 2)

At this point, some additional writing habits of our scribe should be highlighted in order to help add some other texts to his corpus of writings:

- When the text that he wrote is faint due to lack of ink, he touches it up after dipping his pen. He does not try to follow the faint signs precisely (e. g. \(C,r1\)), but instead redraws the entire sequence independently (Table 2b, a).

- A supra lineam addition in the same hand shows that the scribe proofreads his texts directly after writing them, though he does not care much about overlaps between the supralinear additions and the signs belonging to the main line. As shown by Table 2b (b), \(\downarrow\) overlaps with \(\uparrow\) and \(\uparrow\) overlaps with \(\uparrow\).

- Some words he wrote very quickly, and some signs he wrote in highly simplified fashion. Table 2b (c) is a case in point.\(^{(39)}\) Here the evil-bird \(\text{ on the edge of the }\) ostracon is barely visible in the spelling of \(ḥkr \) ‘to be hungry’, and all the more so because the subsequent \(\text{ sign overlaps with }\)

- In terms of spelling habits, the particle of thematization \(jr \) ‘as for’ is written as \(\text{ (Table 2b, d–e), instead of the usual }\)

\(\text{, which can be used as an additional hard-marker of this scribe.}

\(^{(36)}\) The third sign in this line is definitely \(nfr\) (compare with Fischer-Elfert 1986, 65, n. d), not \(\uparrow\) (Hagen 2011, 99). The confusion derives from strokes belonging to the (erased) line above.

\(^{(37)}\) Hagen 2011, 35.

\(^{(38)}\) Quack (2013, 169) translates “Ich dürste nach Bedarf in der aufgehenden Sonne, und du, Amun, bist doch aufgegangen.” However, as we shall see below, \(jb-ḥr.t\) should be understood as a compound of the type \(nḏ-ḥr.t\) (Wb. 2, 373,12–20). Furthermore, the First Present pronoun \(tw=k\) would be the expected subject of \(wbn\), used as a pseudo-participle, as suggested by Quack’s translation.

\(^{(39)}\) See Quack 2013, 170, n. 55.
• Finally, the uniliteral ḫ (Table 2b, f–g), with its distinctive <s>-shape, is a reliable marker of texts written during the 19th Dynasty.⁴⁰ As such, it can be used as an initial means to narrow down the dating of this hand, which Posener⁴¹ situated between the mid-19th and mid-20th Dynasty. It likely belongs to the 19th rather than to the 20th Dynasty.

As should be clear from the foregoing, the identification of the ‘messy’ hand clearly relies on a cluster of interwoven features. Now that we are more accustomed to the visual appearance of this hand and the ways in which its features correlate, several other hymns to Amun that share the above-mentioned features can be rather straightforwardly attributed to our scribe. O. DeM 1409⁴² is an obvious candidate. This elaborate prayer, followed by a numerical hymn to Amun,⁴³ was written by a man seeking to recover from blindness (dj=k mîn=j psd=k nfr ‘may you let me see your beautiful light’), a fact that will be of great importance when trying to identify the scribe (Section 5). It also displays all of the features discussed so far; in addition, it also features the rare collocation jb-ḥr.t (l. 3, cf. n. 14), already attested at the beginning of Doc. C. Following Hannes Fischer-Elfert and Joachim Fr. Quack,⁴⁴ I understand this collocation to be a compound construction of the verb jb ‘to think, to reflect, to surmise’⁴⁵ rather than of jbi ‘to be thirsty’.⁴⁶ This is due to (1) the lack of the -classifier, which would be expected, though it is not mandatory, for the verb jbi ‘to be thirsty’; (2) the parallelism with the compound nḏ-ḥr.t ‘to inquire after, to greet’,⁴⁷ which is also a verb of intellection; and (3) the fact that a translation based on jbi ‘to be thirsty’ would be difficult to understand in other contexts in which it occurs.⁴⁸ Its general meaning seems to be in accordance with its etymology, with translations that include ‘to meditate, to think or ponder’, usually about future situations, with a nuance of either hope or fear. Here the text formulates a wish and reads jb-ḥr.t ḫpr htp[=k] ‘hoping that [you] be satisfied […]’ (l. 3–4).

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⁴⁰ Wimmer 1995, 396a–aa; 1998, 1229; Dorn, this volume.
⁴¹ Posener 1971, 59.
⁴² Posener 1977a, 32 & pl. 17–17a.
⁴⁴ Fischer-Elfert 1986, 64 & 65, n. d; Quack 2013, 166.
⁴⁶ Wb. 1, 61,8–10.
⁴⁷ Wb. 2, 373,12–20.
⁴⁸ Pace Quack 2013, 169.
In line with what we have observed for Doc. A and C, the scribe tends to borrow classifiers from homophonic words, such as מַלְיָה ‘light’ (l. 2), with מַלְיָה from psd ‘back’, or מַלְיָה ‘to link, to unite’ (l. 4), with מַלְיָה from mkh‘ back of the head’ (or sim.). Doc. D also allows one to highlight further habits of the ductus that are common to Doc. A–D. The group א, has two distinctive features (Table 3, a–c): (1) the top is shaped almost like the head of a hieratic bird (see Table 3, b where it is touched up) and is not centered horizontally but tends to be positioned on the right-hand side of the group; (2) the bottom part displays two marked angles to the left, the first of which is particularly pronounced in each case, with a clear-cut alternance between oblique and horizontal strokes. The plural strokes ב are also written in quite particular fashion (Table 3, d–f), with the first two horizontal strokes closer to one another, while the bottom part of the sign has a characteristic <z>-shape. Of the three types of variants illustrated here, we shall see that (d) is the most individual to this hand.

Finally, two spellings deserve attention: sntr ‘incense’ is spelled עָנָן (Table 3, g), with the highly unusual group עָנָן in the middle, while the root htp is written עַנָּן, with the two phonetic complements t and p below the htp-sign. This spelling is very ‘hieroglyphic,’ one
might say, and calls attention to a definitional feature of this hand that we have not yet explicitly addressed: while the general appearance of the hand might be ‘messy’, individual groups and signs are often quite detailed and not greatly removed from the appearance of cursive hieroglyphic script. This point echoes the comments by Gasse about O. IFAO 2971: “l’écriture est très serrée ; les lignes ne sont pas régulières, non plus que l’encrage, ce qui confère au texte un aspect dense peu avenant alors que les signes sont plutôt sobres et réguliers”\textsuperscript{49}. Even a glimpse at O. IFAO inv. 2971 (Fig. 6) reveals that this ostracon assuredly belongs to the corpus of the messy scribe.

![Fig. 6. Doc. E = O. IFAO inv. 2971 (© Gasse 1992: 61)](image)

Before leaving Amun for other deities and text types, O. Glasgow D.1925.88\textsuperscript{50} is worth considering. Indeed, the vocabulary of this hymn to Amun\textsuperscript{51} in his solar forms of Ra and Horakhti (Fig. 7) overlaps significantly with one of the texts that we have just examined. Even in facsimile, one quickly recognizes the general habits of the scribe, e. g. the stair-like progression of signs and the way in which the signs collide horizontally (e. g. at the beginning of l. 5, with \textit{tp} infringing upon \textit{hr} in \(\text{\textcircled{hr}}\)).

![Fig. 7. Doc. F = O. Glasgow D.1925.88 (© McDowell 1993: pl. 31a)](image)

Furthermore, the ductus of several common words in Doc. \textit{F} is identical to that observed in other documents examined so far (compare, for instance, \textit{Jmn} in l. 1 and 7 with Table 2a, d–f, and \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{p}}\) \textit{tp} ‘sky’ in l. 3 with Doc. D, 8 [twice]). Finally, the spelling \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) of the verb \textit{ḥtp} (l. 1) is identical to Doc. D, 4, while the unexpected \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) group in \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) \(\text{\textcircled{d}}\) also appears in Doc. D, 10 (cf. Table 3, g). Taken together, these features demand attribution to our scribe. Interestingly, next to his preliminary transcription of this ostracon in his \textit{Notebooks}, Černý wrote ‘Pay’s hand’,\textsuperscript{52} a laconic remark of the highest relevance, as we shall see in Section 5.

\textsuperscript{49} Gasse 1992, 61.
\textsuperscript{50} McDowell 1993, 29–30, pl. 31–31a.
\textsuperscript{51} Note the strong intertextual links with 18\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty visitor graffiti (Navrátilová 2011, 259).
\textsuperscript{52} McDowell 1993, 29 (= Černý, \textit{Notebook} 36, 74).
4. From Amun to Mut and the city of Thebes

The previous sections might give the impression that our scribe was exclusively a devotee of Amun, but O. DeM 1055\(^53\) (Fig. 8) offers a corrective to this idea as well as permitting a segue into discussion of other deities in our scribe’s output. While the first five lines of this ostracon correspond to a hymn to Amun ‘the warrior’ (\(\text{\textit{pꜣ ḥꜣ wtj}}\)), a hymn to Mut follows directly in the same hand.\(^54\)

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Fig. 8. Doc. G = O. DeM 1055 (© Ifao, Archives & Posener 1938, pl. 30a)

The attribution of this text to our scribe is quite straightforward. Line 4 asserts the identity between Amun and the light, Shu (cf. Doc D), as well as the identity between Amun and Pre, in a sentence that reads \([n]tk \text{\textit{pꜣ ṣw, ntk pꜣ Rꜣ°}}\) “you are the light, you are Pre.” As we have seen (Doc. A, 2 and 8; Doc. C, r1), the spelling \(\text{\textit{sꜣ}}\) for the 2SG.M independent pronoun is a habit of our scribe. Further indicators of his hand include the characteristic shape of the \(\text{\textit{pꜣ}}\)-article, with tall aleph (Table 4, a–c); the ductus of Jmn (compare Table 4, d–e with Table 1c, a–b and 2a, d–f) and of \(\Delta\) in the verbal prefix \(\text{\textit{ḥm}}\) (Table 4, f), with the hands and feet appearing high on the body stroke (compare Table 2a, i–j).

(a) G,1  
(b) G,4  
(c) G,4  
(d) G,2  
(e) G,3  
(f) G,5  
(g) G,4  
(h) A,8  
(i) B,2  
(j) C,r4  
(k) D,7  
(l) B,1

Table 4. Indicators of scribal hand in Doc. G and beyond

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\(^53\) Posener 1938, 15 & pl. 30–30a.

\(^54\) Mathieu (1996, 240–241), who discusses the intertextual links between numerical hymns and love songs, considers the hymn to Mut on this ostracon to be a direct source of inspiration for several stanza found in the Chester Beatty Cycle.
The occurrence of Ra in Doc. G (Table 4, g) further allows me to comment on the ductus of two signs that have not yet been discussed. His are made up of two strokes: the first stroke almost takes the shape of a hieratic n and is usually very flat and horizontal (Table 4, g–i) even though more curved variants occur (Table 4, j–k), while the second stroke starts from the left and reflects a flattened loop downwards. The is also noticeable: while the shape of this sign varies significantly in the cases where it is written and preserved, the stroke on top of the vertical line opens towards the left (Table 4, k), and fairly often takes a slightly curved shape (Table 4, l).

If the surface of the medium (pottery sherds vs. limestone) generally affects the overall appearance of the texts (with a slightly more fluid ductus on pottery sherds), the essential features of the hand are not deeply impacted by this variable. This is demonstrated by a comparison between Doc. G and the magical incantation on O. Fitzwilliam Museum E.GA.6128.1943, v°.

In this magical spell, pronounced by ‘The Great’ – namely, Iaret ‘the Uraeus’ – it is possible to observe writing habits that are typical of our ‘messy scribe’ (while the drawings on top of the ostraca also reflect his scribal profile). The following features are readily recognizable: signs that overlap horizontally (Table 5, a), the stair-like progression of groups of signs (Table 5, b–c), the typical two-stroke sign (Table 5, f–h; cf. Table 3, d–f), as well as a classifier exchange (with hsf ‘to approach’ written as  ‘to repel’). Additionally, three points deserve further mention. First, the scribe wrote (Table 5, c, with his usual spelling of the group) for what is surely to be read as htp=s. This is certainly a means to graphically mark the final occlusive p at the end of htp (much like is used to mark the final occlusive t), as illustrated by his spelling of hpr as in Doc. D, 3. Second, the scribe seems to have

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55 Hagen 2011, 25–26 & pl. 84–86.
56 Note here the variant of hr (compare with Table 3, a–c), with a dot instead of a ligature for r.
struggled with the ؤ-sign (Table 5, d), resorting to six somewhat hesitant strokes. Interestingly, the same observation applies to Doc. F (Table 5, e), where the sign is similarly formed and touched-up on top. Finally, note that the ؤ-sign occurs several times in Doc. H (Table 5, i-l) and that the scribe resorts to four strokes, adding a stroke at the bottom left, which sometimes extends quite significantly to the right (Table 5, l).

![Table 5. Some paleographical features of Doc. H](image)

Even if the ink is not particularly well-preserved, especially on the right-hand side of the ostraca, a final text will be discussed in this section in order to illustrate the variety of textual genres mastered by this scribe: the hymn to Thebes on O. DeM 1584.\(^{59}\) Thanks to parallels on O. Petrie 3960 and O. DeM 1641–II,\(^{61}\) the beginning of the hymn – which has not been entirely understood so far – can be reconstructed as 

\[
\text{[mk bw] b=j pr m Ws.t, šd wj hr ms[d=j, jb-]hr.t=j wnn=j m ḫd, jw Njw.t m tp-mr[=j] ṭ Look, I do not want to leave Thebes! Protect me from what I hate, when I think that I am travelling north, while the City is at my side (and ...).}
\]

The occurrence of the compound verb jb-ḥr.t (see Doc. C, r° 1 and Doc. D, 3) is a first clue pointing to our scribe. The paleographical features of the text further strengthen this attribution, for instance, the stair-like progression of certain groups of signs (Table 6, a–b; compare [a] with ḫbs.w in Doc. C, v° 3), the characteristic ductus of Jmn (Table 6, c–d) and the plural strokes (Table 6, a, e–f), as well as the distinctive shape of (with the body stroke extending downwards).

![Table 6. Some paleographical features of Doc. I](image)

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\(^{60}\) HO 8.3.

\(^{61}\) Posener 1980, pl. 66.
In addition, the occurrence of *nb.t* in l. 2 allows us to observe that this scribe resorts almost exclusively to the closed variant of [ Image ] (Table 6, i–p), with a horizontal stroke on top of the basket, the only occurrence of the open variant in the texts examined so far appears in the temporal phrase *r nb* ‘every day’ (Table 6, q).

![Image of ostraca]

**Fig. 10. Doc. I = O. DeM 1594 (© Ifao, Archives & Posener 1978, pl. 46a)**

5. Towards an identification of the scribe: the letters sent by Pay (i)

While looking through the literary compositions by our scribe, various pieces of evidence that might help in narrowing down the number of possible individuals behind this hand have also been observed. The provenance of the ostraca makes clear that we should look inside the community of Deir el-Medina, while the specific ductus of some signs (e.g. [ Image ]) clearly points to the 19th Dynasty. We further observed the writer’s obvious attachment to Amun (Doc. A–D, F–G) – including a prayer asking for recovery from blindness (Doc. D) – and to the city of Thebes (Doc. I). We also noted the presence of drawings on one of the ostraca (Doc. H) as well as hieratic signs with cursive hieroglyphic shapes (Section 3). Finally, we have a comment by Černý concerning Doc. F that reads simply ‘Pay’s hand.’

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62 Cf. Möller II, 510
In agreement with Černý’s identification, the most obvious candidate for our ‘messy scribe’ is the draughtsman Pay (i), son of Ipuy (v), who was active in the community during the first part of the 19th Dynasty, and who is mostly attested during the early years of Ramesses II.63 Pay (i) regularly bore the title ‘draughtsman of Amun (in the Place of Truth)’64 and probably worked with his father Ipuy (who was also a draughtsman) within Amun’s temple precinct at Karnak before he was transferred onto the Deir el Medina workforce. This could explain in part his devotion to Amun and to the city of Thebes. Pay (i) was the founder of a family dynasty of draughtsmen in Deir el-Medina: at least three of his sons and five of his grandsons followed in his professional footsteps. This profession may account for idiosyncrasies of his hand. This could account for idiosyncrasies of his handwriting. He may have passed away at a ripe old age, around year 47 of Ramesses II.65

As we shall see, the various features discussed above match what we know about his life and career but also what we know about his other scribal habits. In order to further concretize our identification of Pay (i) as the messy scribe, I turn to the letters sent by Pay (i). These are a sound point of departure, following the (somewhat positivistic but nonetheless realistic) hypothesis that, as a literate in the community,66 he would have penned them himself. Within the published material, there are four different letters that were sent by Pay (i) (Fig. 11–14). The best of these to begin with is O. Berlin P. 11247.67 In this letter to one of his sons – either Prehotep (i) or Preemheb (i)68 – he says that he is not doing well and is suffering due to a loss of sight. Amun has abandoned him,69 he says, and he asks his son to provide him with honey and other products to serve as medicine for his ailing eyes.70 The contents of this letter echo the prayer to Amun in Doc. D (l. 2: ḏj=k min=j psḏ=k ‘may you let me see your light!’). Additionally, Goldwasser71 has highlighted the literary Late Egyptian registers and style used in this letter, which would be expected of a scribe versed in literature.

64 E. g. Weiss 2015, 84 and 86.
65 If he is the Pay mentioned in O. Turin CGT 57062, r 6. But his grandson Pay (ii) is a more likely candidate for the individual mentioned in this text (see already Davies 1999, 150).
67 Deir el Medine Online ID 290 (https://dem-online.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/fragment.php?id=209).
68 Preemheb (i) is perhaps more likely because, where the name of the addressee is preserved in other letters (Doc. K and M), it is Preemheb (i) who is asked for help.
70 In texts displaying personal piety, the divinity (here Amun) may be both punisher and savior (see Posener 1975, 202, n. 20 for a mention of this letter with previous references to the topic). Cf. for instance O. Cairo 12202, r * & v * (= Posener 1975, 196–201 and pl. 19) for an invocation of Amun from someone who has recovered from blindness.
In terms of its hand, this letter exemplifies the paleographical features identified in Section 2–4, from the more general – marked dipping, the occasionally stair-like progression of signs (Table 7, a), and signs that collide horizontally\(^\text{72}\) (Table 7, b) – to the specific: \(\text{jmn}\) conforms to the usual ductus (Table 7, c), the \(\text{p}\) adopts its typical shape with a tall aleph (Table 7, d), the \(\text{nb}\)-basket is closed on top (Table 7, e), the \(\text{ḥ}\) takes the expected \(\text{s}\)-shape (Table 7, f–g), and some signs are rendered in a ‘hieroglyphic’ fashion (Table 7, h–i).

![Table 7. Some paleographical features of Doc. J](image)

Taken together, the contents and formal characteristics of this letter seem to confirm that the messy scribe was indeed behind O. Berlin P. 11247. But is this letter an autograph? This would allow us to identify the messy hand with Pay (i). As I will show below, I think that we have every reason to answer in the affirmative, as these distinctive formal features occur in all of the letters sent by the draughtsman Pay (i). Instead of tediously rehearsing these paleographical arguments for each of the next three letters, however, I will focus on some (a) stylistic and grammatical, (b) orthographical, and (c) paleographical features that have not been discussed thus far. These appear in O. Černý 1973 – a moving letter in which Pay (i) asks his son Preemheb (i) to help him acquire some commodities for the funeral of his wife and

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\(^{72}\) Note that a \(\text{n}\) is to be added in the hieroglyphic transcriptions of \(\text{v}^\circ\ 1\) (see Deir el Medine online): it is visible below the front leg of the bee, but the scribe – following a habit of his – wrote over it almost entirely after dipping his brush. See Doc. M, r2 for another use of this phrase by Pay (i).

\(^{73}\) *HO* 16 & pl. 54.4–54a.4.
Preemheb’s mother, Merytre (ii) – and in O. Fitzwilliam Museum E.AG.6135.1943\(^{74}\) and O. DeM 10249\(^{75}\) – in which Pay (i) again asks Preemheb (i) to bring him a series of goods.

In terms of written style, Grandet noted of O. DeM 10249 that: “[c]et emploi d’un vocabulaire rare ou original (...), et de tournures grammaticales recherchées (...), témoignent probablement de l’érudition de l’auteur du document.”\(^{76}\) He thus concurs with Goldwasser that the missives must have been written by a man of letters. Interestingly, it appears that \textit{variatio delectat} when Pay (i) swears by a god. Instead of the typical \textit{wih ūmn (wih \textit{pi hki})} formula, he refers to several deities – \textit{wih \textit{pi šw}} (Doc. L, v2), \textit{wih \textit{Ptḥ}} (Doc. M, 4), \textit{wih \textit{pi R}}\(^{7}\) (Doc. M, 13) – a rare feature in the corpus of oaths from Deir el-Medina.\(^{77}\)

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\(^{74}\) Hagen 2011, 36–37 and pl. 44–45.

\(^{75}\) Grandet 2010, 131–134 and 358; Müller 2010, 312 and 317.

\(^{76}\) Grandet 2010, 133.

\(^{77}\) Polis 2011, 390–391.
The morphological and orthographical choices in the letters are rather old-fashioned and conservative. Together, they are indicative of an (early) 19th Dynasty composition.\(^7\) Three examples can be given to illustrate this point. (1) The old subjunctive morphemes of the verbs jni ‘to bring’ and mju ‘to see’ – .t and .n respectively – are spelled out, for example, jḥ-jn.t=k ‘could you bring’ (Doc. J, v1; Doc. M, 2\(^7\)) and dj=k mju.n=j ‘may you let me see’ (Doc. D, 2). (2) The 3PL suffix pronoun =sn is still employed for the sḏm=f constructions (Doc. B, 2, Doc. H, 4 & 5) and the possessive determiners (Doc. K, r3; Doc. L, r3), while the 3PL suffix =w is attested after nouns (Doc. K, r\(^*\) 4) and the jw of the Third Future (Doc. F, 2). (3) The predicative negation is usually written nn (nominal predication = D, 7–8 & 11; G, 2 & 6; First Present = J, 2; existential = M, 5; infinitive = C3, v4). The Late Egyptian negation bn is limited to letters, for the subjunctive form (Doc. L, v4) and for the First Present pattern introduced by the rhetorical question marker js bn\(^8\) (Doc. J, v5).

![Fig. 14. Doc. M = O. DeM 10249 (© Ifao Archives)](image)

Zooming in on the spellings, three features are noticeable.\(^8\) (1) The sš-ḥd ‘draughtsman’ title is sometimes spelled out in full and sometimes abbreviated, even in the same document (Table 8, a vs. b). The choice between the two variants seems to have been motivated by the space available for the first lines of the letters, which contain – in all four letters discussed here – the complete names of the sender and of the addressee. (2) The preposition ḫnꜥ ‘with, and’ is written \(^\text{\ding{180}}\) (Table 8, c–d). This spelling cannot be used in itself to identify a hand, though it is specific to a limited number of hands from Deir el-Medina during the 19th Dynasty, and particularly the reign of Ramesses II.\(^9\) As such, it can be used as an efficient heuristic device for potentially identifying further texts written by the messy scribe. (3) In this respect,

\(^7\) Winand 1995.
\(^8\) See Winand 1992, 223 with Müller 2010, 312.
\(^8\) Note that snfr ‘incense’ is written normally in Doc. K, r5, and not with the unusual spelling discussed at the end of Section 3.
\(^9\) According to the Ramses corpus (http://ramses.ulg.ac.be; see Polis et al. 2013, Winand et al. 2015), this spelling is attested 22 times as of the end of May 2021.
the spelling of the infinitive of *jnī* ‘to bring’ is noteworthy as well (Table 8, e–f), with the unusual classifiers.

![Table 8. Orthographical and paleographical features of the letters](image)

Regarding the paleographical features of individual signs, two habits of the ductus are noticeable. As observed in Section 2 (see Table 1c, j), our scribe could write his hieratic much like a *ḥa*. This is very clearly the case in the introductory formula of Doc. K (Table 8, h) and it has led to some faulty hieroglyphic transcriptions of this scribe’s hieratic texts (e. g. *HO 54.4*). The *ḥ*-sign (e. g. Table 8, i–k) is also particularly distinctive, especially as regards the four diagonal strokes added to the main vertical body of the sign.

As can be seen, the handwriting across the letters penned by Pay (i) is very consistent. It also perfectly mirrors the observations made above concerning the messy scribe of the literary compositions discussed in Section 2–4. As such, I believe it is reasonable at this stage to hypothesize that the messy scribe was indeed the draughtsman Pay (1). Before proceeding, however, it should be stressed that the corpus of letters sent by Pay (i) is obviously not limited to communications in which the name of the sender has been preserved. O. DeM 10111, for example, possesses all the formal characteristics of a letter written by Pay (i), though the names of the sender and addressee of this letter are lost.

6. Negative evidence: letters from Nebre (i) and Khay (i), or, “not everything messy is Pay’s”

So far, I have provided only positive evidence for the clustering of texts together based on their resemblances, but I have not contrasted the hand of our messy scribe with other hands. Put bluntly, an obvious criticism of the preceding attributions of texts to Pay (i) might read as follows: you are lumping together texts with similar hands, but in doing so, you have ignored aspects in which these texts vary; in fact, these texts may have been written by different scribes with similar hands.

In order to forestall such criticism, it is necessary to compare the hand behind the texts I have attributed to Pay (i) with other hands from the same time and place. In this respect, I have chosen ostraca that were penned by very similar hands: my comparanda take the form of letters sent by both his son Nebre (i) and his grandson Khay (i), two draughtsmen of the

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84 Grandet 2006, 112 & 311.
family. Given what we know about scribal education in the village, the transfer of scribal knowledge and the mediation of scribal practices is likely to have taken place to a large extent within the family, with a subsequent filiation of hands. Here I consider two letters sent by Nebre (i) – one to his brother Preemheb (i) (O. Buxelles E 6781) and another to his son Nakhtamun (iii) (O. DeM 558) – and two letters sent by Khay (i) – one to his uncle (literally ‘brother’) Preemheb (i) (P. Grdseloff) and the other to an unknown individual (O. DeM 581).

Fig. 15. Doc. N = O. Bruxelles E 6781 (© MRAH, Bruxelles)

A glance at the two letters by Nebre (i) (Figs. 15–16) immediately reveals that we are dealing with the same family of hands, which share a dense organization of the text, a tendency for the neatness of the hand to deteriorate as the text unfolds, similar orthographical habits (note, for instance, the prepositionḥnꜥ written in Doc. O, r7), and a similar ductus for individual signs. Consider, for instance,  in Doc. O, 3 (and compare it with Table 2a, e–j; 4, f; 6, g–h) or the that is closed on top (e. g. Doc. N, r1 & 2; Doc. M, r1).

However, there are also features that we have not observed so far in the corpus of texts attributed to Pay (i). The most noticeable differences are as follows. (1) The inking of the texts is much more homogeneous in Docs. N–O; these texts do not feature the noticeable dipping effect that can be observed in the documents in Sections 2–5. (2) The lines are considerably straighter, without the stair-like progression that we documented in all of the texts above.

85 It would also have been possible to investigate letters sent by his son Prehotep (i), such as O. DeM 303, or his grandson Nebnetem (i), such as O. DeM 119 and 317, but I decided to limit my investigations to one branch of the family within the framework of this contribution.
87 I disregard Nebre’s model letter to the Vizier Paser on O. Toronto A 11, v° 13–25 (Gardiner 1913, 16d–e & m–n; cf. Raedler 2004, 328), an ostracon which deserves a study of its own, as well as setting aside O. DeM 10250 (Grandet 2010, 134–135 & 359–360), a poorly preserved text that nonetheless conforms with my conclusions below.
88 KRI VII, 200,10–201.2.
89 Sauneron 1959, 3 & pl. 5.
90 Grdseloff 1940.
91 Sauneron 1959, 7 & pl. 16–16a.
92 Conversely, some spelling habits are specific to Nebre (i) and were not observed above for Pay (i), like the orthography ḫ for the demonstrative determiner psj. Note that O. DeM 784 (a short communication to Nakhtamun, like Doc. O) and O. DeM 790 (a letter to an unknown individual) display the same spelling of the demonstrative determiner and are most likely by the same hand.
(except for Doc. G). (3) The general ductus is much smoother and more rounded. (4) Finally, some frequent hieratic signs and groups of signs deviate significantly from what we have observed so far.

Fig. 16. Doc. O = O. DeM 558 (© Ifao, Archives)

Table 9 (a–d) shows the different appearance of the group אב in the two letters sent by Nebre (i). The aleph in these letters is always quite small, in stark contrast with what we saw in the texts attributed to Pay (i) (cf. Table 9, e, for an extreme case; see further Table 1c, c–d; 2a, g–h; 4, a–c, 7d). The mn-group in Nebre (i)’s letters knows two main variants: the fully ligatured version in the name of the sš-ken Nh-t-Imn, for instance (Table 9, e), and the non-ligatured version (e. g. Table 9, f–g). The non-ligatured version appears at first glance to be quite similar to Pay (i)’s mn (Table 9, h), but it actually features an additional horizontal stroke on top of the אב-sign. The hr-group is quite similar as well (Table 9, i–j), but markedly narrower than in the texts attributed to Pay (i) (e. g. Table 9, a–c). Lastly, note that the spatial organization of the signs sometimes differs as well: while the f is below the w in the sequence jw=f in the texts attributed to Pay (i) (e. g. Table 9, k), it follows the w in Nebre (i)’s letters (e. g. Table 9, j).

Table 9. Comparison of some hieratic groups in documents attributed to Nebre (i) and Pay (i)

Taken together, these observations are sufficient to postulate a filiation between the hands of Pay (i) and his son Nebre (i). At the same time, the comparison reflects numerous dissimilarities, suggesting that Nebre (i) was not the messy scribe who authored the literary compositions discussed in Section 2–4. The same conclusions hold for the two letters written by Khay (i) examined below (Fig. 17–18).
Unfortunately, these two documents are either short (Fig. 17) or badly damaged (Doc. Q). This obviously hampers a proper paleographical comparison of these letters with the documents attributed to Pay (i). However, enough text is preserved to highlight both commonalities – such as the overall disorganized and messy appearance of the hand, the minimal horizontal spacing between signs (including some overlaps), the spelling 𓊑 of the preposition ḥn ‘with, and’ (Table 10, a–b) – and differences. As to the latter, we can observe in Doc. P the abbreviated form of the 𓊑 (Table 10, c) next to the 𓊑 with tall aleph (Table 10, d); the 𓊑-sign is also open on top (Table 10, e–f); and the 𓊑-group is attested with an additional stroke in the middle of the mn-sign (Table 10, g). These are features that do not occur in the texts attributed to Pay (i).

![Fig. 17. Doc. P = P. Grdseloff (© ASAE 40,1940, p. 533)](image)

The sentence 𓊑 ‘Bring me a fledgling’ (Doc. P, r° 4–6) is interesting in at least two respects. First, from an orthographical point of view, the scribe employs a ‘faulty’ phonographic spelling of the verb jnī ‘to bring’. Second, from a paleographical viewpoint, the yod of this verb form is written with a relatively uncommon three-stroke ductus. These two features recall the habits of the scribe who penned the two Turin letters published in this volume and suggest that we might viably consider Khay (i) to be their author. To the best of my knowledge, this phonographic spelling of the imperative of jnī occurs in just one other (also very short) communication between two draughtsmen, O. UC 32245.

![Table 10. Hieratic features of letters sent by Khay (i)](image)

The brevity of this letter prevents proper paleographical

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93 Sauneron 1959, 7 comments on the poor state of preservation of the text of O. DeM 581: “le texte entier a été lavé ou barbouillé d’encre après avoir après sa rédaction, de sorte que la surface est devenue d’un gris sale”. As such, I refer only to the facsimile in this contribution.
94 Demarée, Gabler & Polis, Section 5.
95 HO 34.3.
judgement, but one can certainly not rule out a connection of some sort between the two hands.

Fig. 18. Doc. R = O. UC 32245 (© Petrie Museum)

7. Extending the corpus of texts attributed to Pay (i):
Identifying and connecting documents

The palaeographical data surveyed in Section 6 demonstrate that – even within a family of hands – it is possible to isolate individuals by correlating an array of features. In this final section, I explore three more examples in order to illustrate different means by which we might attribute further texts to Pay (i). These examples were cherry-picked from amongst the writings that I deem most likely to have been written by Pay (i) and that I believe have the most potential to enrich his ‘scribal profile.’

Fig. 19a. Doc. S = O. Strasbourg H. 188

Fig. 19b. Doc. T = O. Strasbourg H. 190
(© BNU Strasbourg)

The first example (Fig. 19a–b) shows that Sections 2–4 did not exhaust the corpus of texts by Pay (i) that feature prayers and hymns to Amun (and other deities). As shown in Table 10, two ostraca from the Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire of Strasbourg – O. Strasbourg H. 188 and H. 190 – display the characteristic features of Pay (i)’s hand. One can observe, for instance, (a) the ductus for Jmn (including the backward-facing D; cf. Section 4); (b) the

96 Koenig 1997, 15, pl. 97 & 134.
97 These two ostraca can be usefully contrasted with O. DeM 1262 (= Posener 1972, 42 & pl. 69–69a; Fischer-Elfert 1986, 68–69; Fischer-Elfert 1997, 117–120; Quack 2013, 166–167), which contains a hymn to Amun (r°, written in red ink) and a hymn to Thot (v°, written in black ink). While O. DeM 1262 displays some similarities to Pay (i)’s hand, typical features of his hand are not present and the ductus of some signs is markedly different.
98 Such a case can usefully be contrasted with O. DeM 1262 (= Posener 1972, 42 & pl. 69–69a; Fischer-Elfert 1986, 68–69; Fischer-Elfert 1997, 117–120; Quack 2013, 166–167), which contains a hymn to Amun (r°, written in red ink) and a hymn to Thot (v°, written in black ink). While displaying some similarities with Pay (i)’s hand,
‘hieroglyphic’ organization of htp (cf. Section 3); (c) the tall-aleph ρ; and (d) the two-stroke plural marker (e. g. Table 3, d–f).

Table 11. Paleographical features of Docs. S–T

A first advantage (and positive side-effect) of the emphasis on handwriting adopted in this paper is that one becomes familiar with the idiosyncrasies of a hand and can regularly enhance the hieroglyphic transcription of the editiones principes as a result. Table 12 shows the results of such an exercise for Doc. T. Interestingly, hp.tj (l. 2) could be an early attestation of the word ‘universe,’ known from other texts from the Ptolemaic Period onwards, while l. 4 is probably a phraseological parallel to Doc. D, 4, with the nominal predication ntf pi R: ‘He is Pre’ (the unusual spelling of the 3SG.M independent pronoun ntf as 𓊦𓊦 echoes what we observed for the 2SG.M, e. g. in Doc. A, 2 and 8 and Doc. C, r1).

Table 12. Improved readings of Doc. T

A second advantage of this approach is that fragments that might belong to the same document can be clustered together more easily. In the present case, it quickly became obvious that O. DeM 1084 represents the left-hand side of O. Strasbourg H. 188 (Fig. 20), since the first four lines read continuously: ḫꜥḏ ṭḥt (l. 1), ṭḥt ḫꜥḏ (l. 2), ḫꜥḏ ṭḥt (l. 3), and ṭḥt ḫꜥḏ ṭḥt (l. 4). Furthermore, Doc. T is likely to have been part of the same composition – if not the same document – since its l. 1 must read ḫꜥḏ ṭḥt (Table 12), which corresponds to the sequence of Doc. U, l. 3.

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99 See already the emendations suggest by Müller 2000, 284.
100 Wilson 1997, 639.
The second and third examples – O. DeM 1654\textsuperscript{102} and O. DeM 1657\textsuperscript{103} respectively – broaden the number of text genres that the messy scribe may be said to have had an interest in. According to Posener,\textsuperscript{104} both these texts were copied on “tesson[s] de poterie gris verdâtre,” but while the first is written parallel to the axis of the vase, the second is said to have been inscribed perpendicular to this axis, thereby excluding the possibility that they both belonged to a single composition. That said, both texts do appear to belong to the genre of ‘Songs’ and thematize the heart (lexicalized as both $jb$ and $hnty$) as the center of emotions: $mk$ $jb=j$ [...] ‘look, my heart [...]’ (Doc. V, 4), $hnty=j$ $r$ [...] ‘my heart is towards [...]’ (Doc. V, 5), $ji$ $jb=j$ $stp[...$ ‘indeed my heart is loaded [...]’ (Doc. V, 6), $jb=j$ $wnm$ ‘I want to eat’ (Doc. W, 1), $sy$ $n$ ‘qi-$jb$ ‘it is for the righteous’ (Doc. W, 4).

\textsuperscript{102} Posener 1980, 94 and pl. 74–74a.
\textsuperscript{103} Posener 1980, 95 and pl. 75–75a.
\textsuperscript{104} Posener 1980, 94–95.
The paleographic features of these ostraca argue for their unambiguous attribution to Pay (i). They show (a) the familiar alternation of dark and faint ink (passim); (b) the stair-like progression of groups of signs (passim), as well as colliding lines (Doc. V, 5–6); (c) overlapping signs, in particular the group \( \underline{\text{\textbar}} \) over \( \underline{\text{\textbar}} \) in Doc. V, 3, which does not appear to reflect an emendation (since \( [s]dr \ h n=k \) ‘sleep with you’ would make perfect sense); and (d) the characteristic shape of \( \underline{\text{\textbar}} \) (Doc. V, 5 and Doc. W, 1; compare with Table 2a, e–j; 4, f; 6, g–h).

If I am correct in attributing these additional texts to Pay (i), this shows that he was an actual polygraph, able to produce texts in various literary genres at a time when those genres were emerging within the corpus of texts from the community of Deir el-Medina.

8. Conclusions

Before concluding, I would like to stress once more that this contribution reflects only the tip of the iceberg – many more documents by the same hand have been identified in both the published and unpublished materials from Deir el-Medina – and a complete reconstruction of the corpus of texts written by the messy scribe represents a long-term project. The present contribution is thus more a proof-of-concept than an exhaustive endeavor. Nonetheless, in spite of the fledgling nature of this investigation, a series of preliminary conclusions may be drawn based on the paleographical and – to a lesser extent – orthographical observations made in this paper:

1. Provided that we possess enough material written by a given scribe, it is possible to trace that scribe’s hand across texts and genres – even when the compositions are not ‘signed,’ as in the case of Amennakhte (v).\(^{105}\) In order to successfully track a hand, a set of features specific to that hand have to be identified, while their co-occurrence can be used to distinguish between groups of similar hands (Section 6).

2. Shorter documents represent a challenge for handwriting analysis, as a sound attribution necessarily relies on a set of converging paleographical and orthographical features. The shorter the text, the harder it is to assess whether or not it belongs to a given cluster of texts.

3. Although Pay (i)’s handwriting varies slightly from text to text, there is no correlation between the quality of the hand and the (literary or non-literary)\(^{106}\) genre of the text. It is precisely the fact that his hand remains the same across genres that allows us to track this scribe.\(^{107}\)

4. When available, data about provenance can help to cluster texts together. In Section 2, we saw that the discovery of several texts by the same hand in Maison G/J is what set the present research in motion. Annex 1 further shows that all of the texts for which we possess a precise provenance come from areas located north of the village (GMN, K 215, KGP, and Maison G/J).

The present case-study is certainly interesting in its own right, but in my view – it should serve mostly as a foundation for studies in broader domains. In the field of literature, for example, Pay (i) may have represented one of the first ‘authors’ in Deir el-Medina, paving the way for a number of draughtsmen-scribes\(^ {108}\) – individuals who are known to have written literary compositions and sometimes ended up occupying the official role of scribe in the

\(^{105}\) See Dorn & Polis 2019, with previous references on the topic.

\(^{106}\) Note that Pay (i)’s hand seems to be attested in documentary texts dealing, for instance, with deliveries, but their analysis would require a study of its own.

\(^{107}\) The possible diachronic changes affecting Pay (i)’s hand is.

\(^{108}\) See the discussion in Laboury 2016.
village – such as Menna (i),
Amennakhte (v),
Harshire (i),
and Amenhotep (vi)
to name the most famous exemplars. Pay (i)’s literary production suggests that the scribal 
environment of Deir el-Medina might have fostered a conceptual shift from scripture to 
author.
Indeed, the originality of Pay (i)’s compositions shows beyond doubt that 
creativity flourished in the literary works of the Deir el-Medina community long before the 
first official claims of authorship during the 20th Dynasty with their ‘signatures’.
This creativity in the literary realm appears to correlate with Pay (i)’s expressions of personal 
piety. The hymns that he wrote evidently furnished an auspicious context in which he 
developed his individual style. Keller devoted a study to the religious beliefs of Pay (i)’s 
family. Looking principally at Pay (i)’s stelae and at the names he gave to his children, she 
highlighted his devotion to divinities with solar, astral, or celestial associations, and argued 
that we can observe a diachronic shift within the family’s private pantheon, with increasing 
attention paid to the community’s divine patrons. While this seems quite likely based on the 
available evidence, the profound and stable relationship between the members of this family 
and Amun have largely been overlooked. The hymns to Amun, Mut, and Thebes that I 
attributed to Pay (i) in this paper demonstrate his deep attachment to the Theban gods. Amun 
is identified with several deities in these hymns, including Shu (e. g. Doc. C) and Re-horakhti (e. g. Doc. F). These are also the gods revered on his Stela Turin CGT 50042, where he states: 
“I adore Re when he sets, oh god noble, beloved, and merciful, who hears the prayers, who 
hears the supplications of the one who calls him, who comes to the voice of the one who 
pronounces his name” (I. 2–5). Additionally, Khonsu-in-Thebes Neferhotep is the god praised 
on Stela Turin CGT 50052, a stela that he dedicated to his mother Wadjetetpet (iii). On 
this stela, he calls for mercy regarding his blindness: “look, you made me see the darkness 
that you create. May you be merciful to me, who proclaims: ‘How sweet is your mercy, oh 
Khonsu, to the poor of your town!’ ” (I. 3–5). This obviously echoes Doc. D, where Pay (i) asks 
Amun to let him see his light, as well as Doc. J, in which his son is to deliver him medicine for 
his ailing eyes.
In the corpus of religious texts produced by subsequent generations of Pay (i)’s family, the 
Theban triad looms large as well. The best and most famous example is certainly the so-called 
penitential hymn to Amun on Stela Berlin 20377. In this hymn, Nebre (i), son of Pay (i),

113 Ragazzoli 2019.
114 Loprieno 2019.
115 See already the remark in Valbelle 1985, 340, n. 4.
118 Keller 2008.
119 The attribution of Stela Liverpool Museum 1973.2.340 to Pay (i) – suggested by Criscenzo-Laycock (2011) – is 
highly debatable and is an attribution that I do not consider to be plausible.
120 Tosi & Roccati 1972, 76–77 and pl. 278.
122 Contra the traditional interpretation (i. e., physical blindness), Galán (1999; see also Luiselli 2011, 162–168) 
suggested a metaphorical explanation for this locution: “[s]eeing darkness is a metaphor used to refer to the 
situation in which the deceased finds himself after his Final Judgment and before he reaches the Hereafter, 
where god is” (Galán 1999, 29). In Pay (i)’s case, at least, what we know about his personal life (Section 5) 
assuredly argues in favor of the traditional interpretation.
expresses his deep and humble gratitude towards Amun, who saved his son Nakhtamun (iii). The force of literary and religious tradition was strong within this family.

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Bibliography


# Annex 1 – Ostraca attributed to Pay (i)

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