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JADWIGA IWASZCZUK

*The Works of Seninefer
A Contribution to the Question of the Decoration
of the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut
in Deir el-Bahari*

On the eastern wall of the Upper Terrace of the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari (**Fig. 1**), in the middle of a scene showing marching soldiers, there is a hieratic inscription (**Fig. 2**) written by an unknown scribe in red paint. It states the date and the name of:

 *Sn.j-nfr(.w), sw 20* – ‘Seninefer, day 20’.

The name of Seninefer is known from five ostraca recording progress in the construction of Senenmut's tomb TT 71,¹ where the above mentioned individual did one of the finishing jobs related to the decoration.² His name appears on an ostrakon from the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari.³ As the ostrakon was found in that particular place, the text recorded on it could be regarded as a list of workers who built the temple.

The set of ostraca from Senenmut's tomb confirms the spelling variant of Seninefer's name from the eastern wall of the Upper Terrace. The variant is not mentioned by H. Ranke;⁴ he mentions only a version with a missing suffix.⁵ The latter can also be seen on the ostrakon from Deir el-Bahari described by P. Dorman.⁶

Seninefer's name was preceded with a different epithet twice in the texts from tomb TT 71. In one case he is referred to as *skn(w)*, which means ‘reinforcer, strengthener, consolidator’.⁷ The other word is *tw3w*, ‘shorer’.⁸ It could be supposed that two different people are concerned. However, the context where he is mentioned is exactly the same, together with the same people, and his job described with the same term. The presence of the epithets seems interesting. They could refer to Seninefer's job, just like other titles on the ostraca, e.g., a stone-mason (*hrty(.w)-ntr*, *hrty(.w)*)⁹ or a scribe (*ss*).¹⁰

The job done by Seninefer is, according to the preserved ostraca, is 3^{cc} (**Fig. 3**). L. Keimer is convincing in claiming that the word should be related, however, to another one, namely j^{cc} ,¹¹ mentioned, among others, by A. Badawy.¹² Wörterbuch¹³ explains the meaning of j^{cc} and 3^{cc} as ‘to smear with plaster’.

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¹ W.C. HAYES, *Ostraka and Name Stones*, New York 1973 [= *Ostraka*], Nos. 63–66, 69.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

³ P. DORMAN, *Tombs of Senenmut* [= *Tombs of Senenmut*], New York 1991, p. 88 (26a), Pl. 47.

⁴ H. RANKE, PN I, Verzeichnis, p. 309.5.

⁵ A man bearing the same name with a suffix was recorded in shrine 11 in Gebel el-Silsila (R.A. CAMINOS, T.H.G. JAMES, *Gebel es-Silsilah I*, London 1963, pp. 30–31) with titles *w^cb n Jmn hr s3 tpj* and *hrj t3 ʿt Pr-ʿ3 n nwt rsjt*. Undoubtedly, he is not the same individual as the man from Thebes.

⁶ DORMAN, *Tombs of Senenmut*, p. 88 (26a), Pl. 47.

⁷ R. HANNIG, *Grosses Handwörterbuch*, Mainz 2003 [= GHWb], p. 771; *Wb.* IV, 306.1–3.

⁸ HANNIG, GHWb, p. 920; TLA (24. December 2008) DZA 30.967.180 – DZA 30.967.290; 4; *Wb.* V, 248.12–250.11.

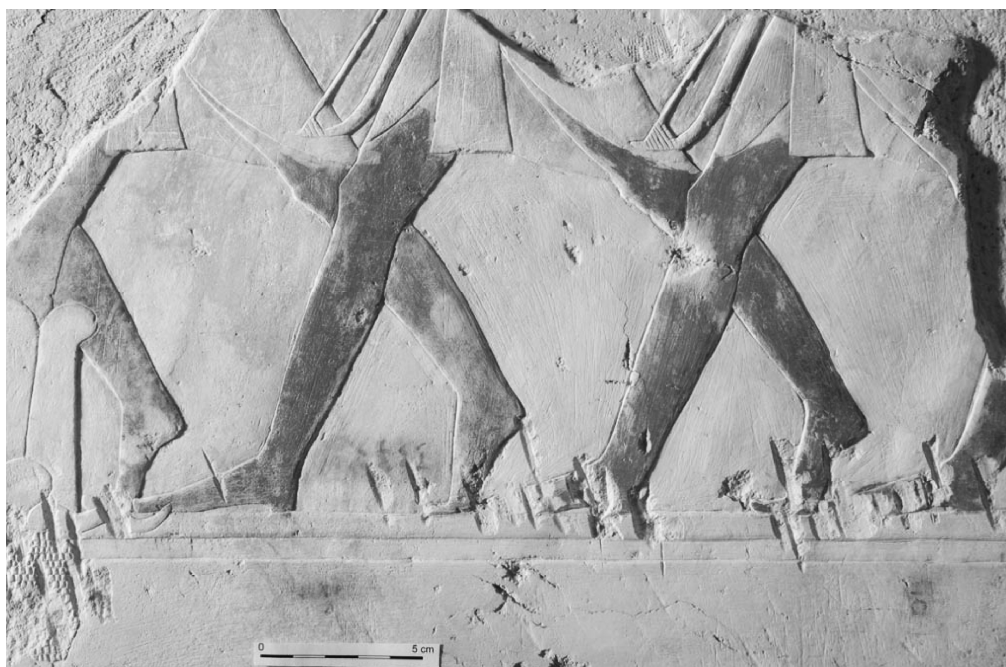
⁹ *Wb.* III, 394–5; e.g. HAYES, *Ostraka*, p. 38, and *Id.*, *Varia from the Time of Hatshepsut*, *JEA* 46, 1957 [= *JEA* 46], p. 32 (4 verso 4, 17 verso 8).

¹⁰ E.g., HAYES, *Ostraka*, 63 (recto 7; 63 verso 1); 64 (recto 6); HAYES, *JEA* 46, p. 31 (2.4 and 2.9).

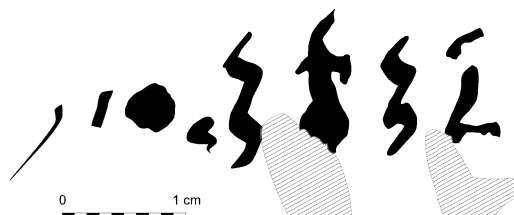
¹¹ L. KEIMER, *Sprachliches und Sachliches zu CΛκω* ‘Frucht der Sykomore’, *Acta Orientalia* 6, 1928 [= *AcOr*: 6], p. 301.

¹² A. BADAWY, *Philological Evidence about Methods of Construction in Ancient Egypt*, *ASAE* 54, 1957, p. 72.

¹³ *Wb.* I, 40.6; I, 2.13; TLA (24 December 2008) DZA 20.297.690; *Wb. Bellegst.* 1, p. 1 I 7 – with reference to *P. Harris I* and boundary stela from Amarna (for stela S – cf. W.J. MURNANE, C.C. VAN SICLEN III, *The Boundary Stelae of Akhenaten*, London – New York 1993, pp. 79–81).



1. Detail of the eastern wall of the Upper Terrace of the Temple of Hatshepsut (Phot. M. Jawornicki).



2. Building dipinti from the eastern wall of the Upper Terrace of the Temple of Hatshepsut (Phot. M. Jawornicki; drawing: J. Iwaszczuk).

W.C. Hayes suggests ‘smooth, plane, true (a wall surface or the like)’¹⁴ for the term β^{cc} . As the discrepancy of translations is quite big, it is a good idea to consider which one seems more likely in the case of Seninefer.

β^{cc} is used only a few times in Egyptian texts. It is mentioned twice in *P. Harris I* and both times refers to decoration of temple walls. First, it is about the temple of Horus: *I restored the walls of his temple, built and made anew, smoothed (β^{cc}) and polished.*¹⁵ The other case is about the temple of Ramses II: *I made a great temple (...), built, laid, smoothed (β^{cc}), and inscribed with designs.*¹⁶ J. Breasted translates the term β^{cc} as ‘smooth’ without any comments. In explanations attached to *P. Harris I* by P. Grandet it is translated as ‘paré’.¹⁷ Nevertheless, P. Vernus refers to the same text and states that the term ‘égaliser’ seems to be better than ‘enduire de plâtre’¹⁸ without providing any rationale. L.-A. Christophe, who made an outline of construction vocabulary on the basis of that papyrus, suggests such equivalents as: ‘couvrir d’un enduit, plâtrer, stuquer’.¹⁹

The text on the boundary stela from Amarna says that the stela should not be β^{cc} with plaster, which L. Keimer translates as ‘mit Stuck, Gips veschmiert’, i.e. ‘made impossible to read’. He claims that the meaning ‘smooth’ does not make sense there.²⁰ Even more so, because right next to it the word *kd*,²¹ ‘gypsum’, is used. The word *kd* was borrowed from Akkadian in the times of the New Kingdom; it was not known in Egypt before.²² As the word β^{cc} obviously goes with the word ‘gypsum’, it seems that the translation cannot be doubted.

The word β^{cc} is also found on an ostrakon from the Twentieth Dynasty mentioned by A.G.H. Gardiner.²³ He quotes a passus which says: *I patched up (β^{cc}) three places on the top of his house, as well as the staircase of his tomb.* In this case, there are no reservations about the meaning as ‘laying plaster’.

The above mentioned examples seem to lead to the conclusion that the best equivalent for β^{cc} , confirmed by its use in context from other sites, is: ‘cover with plaster’ and related meanings. Why then did W.C. Hayes insist on translating it as ‘smooth’?

In comments attached to the dictionary included in *Ostraka and Name Stones* he claims that it means rubbing a surface with pieces of sandstone and believes that it was onomatopoeic and its meaning ‘smooth’ results from the context.²⁴

¹⁴ HAYES, *Ostraka*, p. 31.

¹⁵ J. BREASTED, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest, IV: The Twentieth to the Twenty-sixth Dynasties*, Chicago 1906, p. 181, § 360.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182, § 362.

¹⁷ P. GRANDET, *Le Papyrus Harris I*, Le Caire 1994, I, p. 30, II, p. 193, n. 799.

¹⁸ P. VERNUS, *Athribis*, Le Caire 1978, p. 51 (b).

¹⁹ L.-A. CHRISTOPHE, *Le vocabulaire d’architecture monumentale d’après le papyrus Harris I*, in: *Mél. Maspero I.4*, Le Caire 1961, p. 21.

²⁰ KEIMER, *AcOr*: 6, p. 301.

²¹ J. ČERNÝ, *The Valley of the Kings*, Le Caire 1973 [= Valley], pp. 20–21; W. SPIEGELBERG, *Gipsproben aus Tell el Amarna mit hieratischen Ausschriften*, *ZÄS* 58, 1923 [= *ZÄS* 58], p. 51; F. STEINMANN, *Untersuchungen zu den in der handwerklich-künstlerischen Produktion beschäftigten Personen und Berufsgruppen des Neuen Reichs*, *ZÄS* 107, 1980, p. 148 (2.1.3).

²² SPIEGELBERG, *ZÄS* 58, pp. 51–52.

²³ A.G.H. GARDINER, *The First Two Pages of the Wörterbuch*, *JEA* 34, 1948, pp. 16, 18.

²⁴ HAYES, *Ostraka*, p. 31.

In works published by W.C. Hayes β^c is mentioned exclusively with reference to Seninefer. The man works in a group, together with listed stone-masons Teti, Hepihersaef, and Beshau, as well as with two scribes, Imhetep and Amunu, and also Ihay and a few others whose names are not recorded. Those nameless ones were in charge of carrying plaster.

Three ostraca from Senemut's tomb (Nos. 63, 64, 69)²⁵ seem to be written by the same person, in a more archaic form, where Seninefer's name is spelled with ligature of *f* and *r* (**Fig. 3**).²⁶ Information recorded on them seems to reflect the order of the works. The other ostraca show the name with clear *f* and *r* without ligature, which means there might have been two scribes, one very systematic who recorded the works in the order of execution, and the other one, who was more chaotic and who wrote down names and functions without much care of the order. Sequence of events recorded by the former would be as follows:

1. *dkr* – smoothing (W.C. Hayes is inclined to say ‘face, coat, overlay, cover’,²⁷ and that meaning is later adopted by R. Hannig;²⁸ Ch. Meyer translates it as ‘Putzarbeit’.²⁹ The equivalent ‘smooth’ seems more relevant as the job is made by a stone-mason).

2. $\beta^c d$ – carving, of cutting out of the relief (W.C. Hayes remarks that there were very few surfaces of this kind in tomb TT 71, and consequently, it cannot refer to carving.³⁰ Nevertheless, it might refer to the carved decoration on false door, niche walls, and titles.³¹ It could be understood that the texts report that very moment, especially that carving in those few places was not a quick job)

3. β^c – with meaning prompted above, pp. 40 sq.

4. *drwj* – laying the colour.

It's worth to mention that one activity was absent between point one and two, i.e. drawing contours, which absolutely must have taken place since the relief was of a very good quality.

All that might suggest that β^c means both ‘smooth’ and ‘lay plaster’. The context found in Senemut's tomb does not provide grounds for an unambiguous interpretation. For this reason, it is necessary to refer to other sites mentioned before (cf. *supra*, ostrakon described by A.G.H. Gardiner and the stela from Amarna). It is best to suggest translating β^c as ‘lay plaster’.

It is also possible to see Seninefer's daily progress. Unfortunately, such information remains intact only on two out of five ostraca from Senemut's tomb. Ostrakon 65 says: ... *Sony-nofre smo[othed sec]tions, 5. Finished*. Ostrakon 69 contains more precise data:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22, Pls. XIII–XIV.

²⁶ G. MÖLLER, *Hieratische Paläographie. Die Aegyptische Buchschrift in ihrer Entwicklung von der fünften Dynastie bis zur römischen Kaiserzeit, Erster Band: bis zum Beginn der achtzehnten Dynastie*, Leipzig 1909, p. 68.VIII (*Westcar, Ebers*).

²⁷ HAYES, *Ostraka*, p. 42.

²⁸ HANNIG, *GHwb*, p. 988.

²⁹ Ch. MEYER, *Senemut. Eine prosopographische Untersuchung*, Hamburg 1982 [= Senemut], p. 254.

³⁰ HAYES, *Ostraka*, p. 39.

³¹ DORMAN, *Tombs of Senemut*, Pls. 14–19.

Ostracon No. 53		Ostracon No. 64		Ostracon No. 69	
name	activity	name	activity	name	activity
<i>recto</i>		<i>recto</i>		<i>one sided</i>	
the mason Teti	<i>dkr</i>	Teti	<i>dkr</i>	the mason Hepihersaef	—
Hepihersaef	<i>ʒꜥd</i>	Hepihersaef	<i>ʒꜥd</i>	the mason Beshau	—
Seninefer	<i>ʒꜥꜥ</i>	Seninefer	<i>ʒꜥꜥ</i>	the shorer Seninefer	<i>ʒꜥꜥ</i>
the scribe Iemhetep	<i>drwj</i>	the scribe Iemhetep	<i>drwj</i>		
<i>verso</i>		<i>verso</i>			
the scribe Amunu	—				
1 man	<i>fʒj</i>	2 men	<i>fʒj</i>		

Ostracon No. 65		Ostracon No. 66	
name	activity	name	activity
<i>one sided</i>		<i>one sided</i>	
		[missing]	<i>pbʒ</i>
		[missing]	<i>drwj</i>
the reinforcer Seninefer	<i>ʒꜥꜥ</i>	Seninefer	<i>ʒꜥꜥ</i>
Beshau	<i>fʒj</i>	Beshau	[missing]
Teti	<i>ʒꜥd</i>		
Ihai and 3 men	<i>fʒj</i>		



dkr to smooth, to cover (with gypsum) [MEYER, Senenmut, p. 254; HAYES, Ostraka, p. 41]; followed by TLA (24 December 2008) lemma-no. 550234: verputzen Mauertätigkeit, to cover, to overlay



ʒꜥd to cut (off, down) [TLA (24 December 2008) lemma-no. 152600]; schneiden, abtreten [Wb. IV, 422.13]



drwj to paint [FAULKNER, CD, p. 324]

fʒj to lift, to carry [TLA (24 December 2008) lemma-no. 63460]; hochheben, tragen, erheben [Wb. I, 572]



pbʒ spalten, durchschlagen [Wb. I, 542]

3. The jobs done by Seninefer (and others) in the tomb of Senenmut (TT 71) as recorded on ostraca related to this monument.

... *Sony-nofre smoothed [sec]tion, 1.6 cubits*,³² which equals nearly 85 cm. Both texts use a word of unclear meaning, *dnj*, which is a unit of measurement, translated by W.C. Hayes as ‘section’.³³ J. Černý³⁴ proves beyond doubt that it is ‘a unit of capacity equivalent to *dnjt*’, describing a kind of basket. He attempts at calculating its capacity, but sources provide different versions, a cubic cubit or, according to others, half a cubic cubit.

Knowing how Seninefer worked at Senenmut’s tomb, it might be interesting to find out what it was like to work at the temple. The only clue in that case is the date next to Seninefer’s name.

In construction, dates are found in work reports and on stones as construction dipinti.³⁵ These dipinti are not distributed at random: in particular rows of stones, recorded dates spell each day after day. This kind of quick note was probably made at the end of each working day and then copied on a more convenient carrier, supposedly papyrus. Thus, it is possible to understand how such notes were made. In papyrus sources, the first date stated the year, the season, the month, the day. Then, the season, the month and the year, and finally, only the day.³⁶ This is probably the content of building dipinti on foundation blocks; however, in the Temple of Hatshepsut there are just a few dates spelling the month and the season of the year. Information about other construction works, such as carving a relief or putting the colour could also have been recorded in that way. The inscription on the eastern wall of the Upper Terrace is not the only one found on the walls of the temple; there are some hieratic notes of dates describing the day, however without names, in Hathor Shrine.³⁷

* * *

It is understood that Seninefer was native of Egypt. Otherwise, there would be information about that, just as in other cases related to the workers.

He did his job in a team, and at Senenmut’s tomb the team consisted of casual workers whereas at the Temple of Hatshepsut it was a group of professionals. He did not belong to a high social class. Actually, he was a servant, and according to M. Megally, lower level of that group,³⁸ *sdmw*. His job was laying plaster or, in this case, putty and not white-wash to make a good foundation for painting. Analysis of the decoration of the temple suggests that not all colours were put on a white background. It is likely that whitewash

³² Translation after: HAYES, Ostraka, pp. 21–22.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

³⁴ ČERNÝ, Valley, pp. 20–21.

³⁵ The description is based on information obtained during a conversation with D. Wiczorek, who studies this category of texts from the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari.

³⁶ E.g., *P. Reisner I* and III – cf. W.K. SIMPSON, *Papyrus Reisner I: The Records of a Building Project in the Reign of Sesostris I*, Boston 1963, *passim*; ID., *Papyrus Reisner III: The Records of a Building Project in the Early Twelfth Dynasty*, Boston 1969, *passim*.

³⁷ This material is studied by J. Karkowski.

³⁸ M. MEGALLY, Un intéressant ostracon de la XVIII^e dynastie de Thèbes, *Suppl. BIFAO* 81, 1981, pp. 298–299.

was only put on the wall if such was painter's decision; an average worker, even a skilled one, could not make such decisions. Assuming that ʒ^{cc} referred to laying putty, suggested equivalent 'smooth' might be justified to a certain extent.

It is not clear why Seninefer's name was written next to the date. Perhaps there were a lot of people working on that wall, which seems logical in the case of such a big wall. For this reason, apart from marking the place where a worker finished that day, it was necessary to write his name, so that the amount of work done could be registered by the scribe. That was not necessary in the case of Senenmut's tomb, as it was much smaller and there were just a few workers, among them Seninefer who did all the work referred to as ʒ^{cc}. It is not possible to assess Seninefer's efficiency at the Temple of Hatshepsut, unfortunately the data are too scarce.

The inscription from the eastern wall of the Upper Terrace in the Temple of Hatshepsut gives valuable insight into works of decoration, and particularly because it gives an extremely rare opportunity to learn about craftsmen who built and decorated it.

(Translation by B. Majchrzak)

Jadwiga Iwaszczuk
Zakład Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej
PAN, Warszawa