A Social History of Hieratic Graffiti in Eighteenth Dynasty

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Abstract: The graffiti can be therefore considered as one of the sources of studying Egyptian uses of the past, and the historical tradition of Kings. The study of graffiti allows us to observe the cultural and social identity promoted in these literary works in an archaeologically secure context, and it also helps us to gauge the level of cultural literacy of the scribe.

Key words: Graffiti, Hieratic, A social history, Eighteenth dynasty.

1. Introduction

Egypt has rightly been described as "*Das klassischen Lander der Graffiti.*" (Hausmann., 1969; Peden, 2001) Here mankind has left his most casual and intimate inscriptions in more places and over a longer stretch of time than anywhere else. In Egypt, There are pictorial, hieroglyphic, Hieratic, Demotic, Coptic, Greek, Latin, and Arabic graffiti, and – alas – also modern vandal's graffiti. In the following study I will concentrate only on Hieratic graffiti from 18th - 19th dynasties "the golden age of Egyptian graffiti" (Navrátilová, 2010), which were written with ink or scratched on the walls of tombs, temples and rock cliffs, where some were written by people who lived and worked in these places or visited the monuments.

2. Definition
2.1. Graffiti

Graffiti is the plural of Italian word "graffito", meaning "scratch" (Peden, 2001; Franke, 2001). In Egyptology, the word "graffiti" was first used by Mariette (Thissen, 1992). Although it is not an easy task to find consensus on a precise definition of the term (Navrátilová, 2010) "graffiti, (can be) defined as unofficial writings and drawings that are incised, scratched or painted on rocks, walls or artifacts, provide a graphic testimony to attitudes towards earlier monuments" (Málek, 1992; Navrátilová, 2007; Staring, 2010), created by visitors or other individuals (Navrátilová, 2011).

2.2. Social history

The term `social history' refers to a sub-discipline of the historical sciences on the one hand and on the other hand to a general approach to history that focuses on society at large (Conrad, 2004), When I say "social history", I am trying to explaining the relationship that between graffiti writing and a variety of social institutions such as popular culture, legal institutions, educational institutions, and the media.

3. Hieratic Graffiti and Legal Institutions

Graffiti today are generally viewed as illegal activity, but ancient Egyptian graffiti are different from the modern ones (Navrátilová, 2007), there is no evidence for graffiti being illegal activity. (Peden., 2001) pointed out that "whether these persons had unspoken approval of society or even formal permission in the case of tombs to scribble down their name and title in all places they have done as is another matter". It should be noted that graffiti is a natural activity in ancient Egyptian society. Moreover, there is no indication of the prohibition and prevention of this kind of activities, rather the ancient Egyptians encouraged the activity. Most hieratic graffiti contain the name of the author. The author of the graffiti in TT.36 (Kuhlmann, 1973), which dates to the Saite Period, unequivocally relates the Egyptians' attitude towards the application of graffiti (Staring, 2010). He asks visitors to read the writing and circulate and to write in the empty places.


sš.m ḥr šwr dî.s r n snwy.fy wsy ḥr šw gm.tw im.

Just write <wall> empty and make them passed on from one mouth to another they are registered to places where there and found free.

Additionally, the subject of some of these graffiti were royal orders like what is found in the tomb of Thoutmosis IV (Carter, and Newberry, 2002)

Year 8, third month of Akhet, day 1, under the majesty of the king of upper and lower Egypt, Djoserkheperure Setepenre, the son of re Horemhebmerenamun. His majesty, i.p.h., commanded that the fan bearer on the right hand of the king, royal scribe, overseer of the treasury, overseer of works in the place of eternity and leader of the festival of Amun in Karnak, Maya, son of the dignitary Iway, born of the lady of the house Weret,

be entrusted to renew the burial whmqrs of king Menkheperure justified, in the noble mansion upon the west of Thebes.
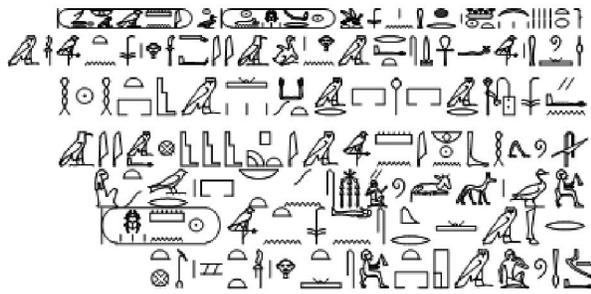
ḥ3t-sp 8 3bd 3 3ḥt sw I ḥr ḥmn nsw-bity (D sr-ḫprw-R͑ Stp-n-R͑) s3 R͑ (Ḥr-m-ḥb mry n Tmn) wd ḥm.f ͑nḫ wd3 snb rdit m ḥr n 3y-ḥw ḥr wnmy n nsw šš nsw imy-r3 prwy-ḥd imy-r3 k3t m st nḥḥ sšm ḥb n Tmn m Tp t-swt My3 s3 s3b Twy ms n nbt pr Wrt r whm krs n nsw Mn-ḫprw-R͑ m3͑ ḫrw m ḥwt špst ḥr imntt W3st

4. Hieratic Graffiti and Educational Institutions

Studying the relationship between hieratic graffiti and educational institutions gives us a clear picture of the social history of graffiti, it is apparent that the education and cultural literacy of the graffiti authors/scribes allowed them to write at least basic graffiti and expressions.

4.1. The Scribes of Graffiti

The authors of graffiti usually introduce themselves simply as 'scribes' and do not indicate what institution they belonged to (Ragazzoli, and Frood, 2013)On the one hand, they are sometimes well-known as higher officials. In *šš*'s context, the word would instead mean 'literate', in reference to the ability to read and write, rather than the administrative function of a scribe (Den Doncker, 2010). On the other hand, they sometimes introduce themselves with another *t w͑b* such as; the " priest", "the gardener". Thus, scholars believe that graffiti were written by priests and officials.

**4.2. The Education of Graffiti Scribe**

In many cases, graffiti provide us with information about the authors/scribes, which might be a reflection of scribal education (Navrátilová, 2012), But the question is how did the author/scribe of the graffiti learn the different forms and formulae? Here it may be useful to give some possible answers. Firstly, the school, the accurate graffiti forms, formulae and the expressions, which are recur through time and space, give us the impression that the graffiti scribes had formal education. It also appears that the writing of graffiti was taught at school (Staring, 2010). Secondly, the archive, the word 'archive' besides meaning a document storage place can broadly

designate the 'hidden structure and condition of the use of words'. Such an abstract structure must have been the source of the usage of words —and also information— found in graffiti. Finally, influences from formal texts, there are similar formulations that can be found in graffiti and formal texts, such as the similar forms of graffiti in the complex of Djoser, in the complex of Senusret III at Dahshur, and the Annals of Thutmose III (Navrátilová, 2012).

4.3. Cultural Literacy

Graffiti can shed light on our picture of the ancient Egyptians, and their attitude towards their history and their cultural literacy where:

1 - It appears that in some cases, they knew the name of the owner of a monument and were aware of his history. The author was aware of where he was recording his text, despite the fact that he lived more than 400 years after its construction; for instance the graffiti at the complex of Djoser at Saqqara (Navrátilová, 2007)
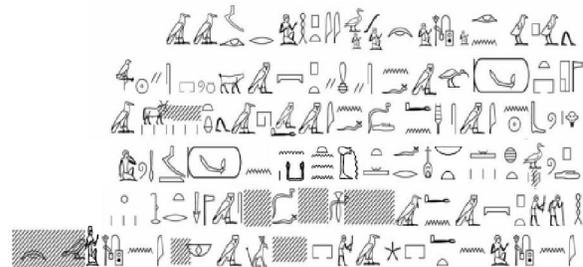
iw.t pw ir.n sš i͑ḥ s3 ypth r m33 ḥw.t ntr (dsr) gm.n.f sy my pt m-ḫnw sy r͑ ḥr wbn im.s ͑ḥ͑ n dd n f imm ḥ3 t.w k3.w 3pd.w ḥt.w nb.wt nfr.wt w͑b.wt n k3 n (dsr) m3͑ ḫrw ḥwi pt m ͑ntiw …w3d …df…s m sntr in sš n ͑t….. sb3 stḫ m ḥ3b in sš nds i͑ḥ.

There came the Scribe Ahmose, son of Iptah, to see the temple of Djoser. He found it as if [there were] heaven in it, Re rising in it. And so he said Let be caused that there come loaves of bread, bulls, fowl, all good and pure things for the ka of Djoser, justified may the heaven send down myrrh, and provide incense for it! (Written) by the scribe, schoolmaster Sethemheb, and the apprentice scribe Ahmose.

But, how were the owners of the monuments, with their names and titles, known to the graffiti authors?

- The role of the scribal schools in transmitting this sort of knowledge and information of the history might again be suggested. The character of texts indicates that the youngsters not only learned how to read and to write but also that they were studying the basis of their culture. Therefore,they were aware of their history. It appears that there were school trips to Asyut and Saqqara.

iwt in sš Ḏḥwty m3ʿ ḫrw r m33 is pn n h3w (Ḥpr-k3-Rʿ)ʿnḫ ḏt wn.in f ḥr dw3 nṯr wrt

ḏḥwty

(*ḫpr k3 tʿ*)
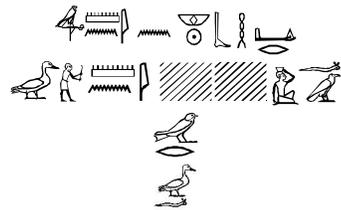
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perhaps within the context of school trips by the local scribes. Teachers likely used wall inscriptions as a kind of blackboard. In the tomb of Ptah m Wia at Saqqara (Demaree, 2010) tomb walls were used as a medium for writing well-known Egyptian didactic texts.

There are also some other rarer uses for Hieratic graffiti, such as visitor commemoration. Graffiti were written to perpetuate the memory of the author, such as in this graffito from TT.36:

sš.tn ḥr šwr di.s r n snwy.fy wsy ḥr šw gm.tw im.
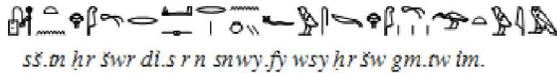
Just write the empty <Wall> and Make it pass on from one mouth to another they are registered on the places that I found there are free

Finally, graffiti may have been written in order to reuse the magical benefits of the representations on the monuments.

6.2. Visiting the Necropolis

Visiting the necropolis is considered to be a popular activity for ancient Egyptians during the 18th-19th Dynasties. However, this fact begs an important question, why were the Egyptians visiting their necropolis? (Wildung, 1984) believes that visiting the necropolis had a religious purpose. But (Peden, 2001) says that visiting the necropolis of Saqqara that "To judge by the graffiti texts they left behind it seems that visitors came to Saqqara for several reasons: to inspect out of a sense of curiosity and piety, the great monuments of a distant past; to offer up prayers to the gods of Western Memphis on behalf of themselves and their families; to honor the memories of famed rulers of the Old Kingdom; and to ask the latter to intercede with the gods for the benefit of the petitioner".

Here it is useful to summarize the reasons of visiting the necropolis. Necropolises were situated within walking distance of settlements. Individuals responded to the deceased's wish to encourage the visitors of his tomb/chapel to take part in his funerary cult, in some cases, on school trips. It is therefore likely that some tombs/chapels (for ex. Tomb n.13.1 at Assyut) served as a place for teaching, and for commemoration during festivals. Finally, they were inspected on tours by dignitaries.

6.3. The scribe of graffiti and the loyalty to their king

The ancient Egyptians were loyal to their kings, whether they were living or deceased. This is proven by a graffiti author/ scribe who wrote about the achievements of rulers, reproducing the phraseology

of eulogy. The graffiti of the sun temple of Userkaf at Abusir (Navrátilová, 2010)provides a good example:

…… year 2, day 2………….., …… under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Men-[kheper]re, Son of Re, Thutmose-Neferkheperu, living forever and ever. As his Majesty was in Syria, [trampling the lands of the Fen]khu and devastating the Hurrians in their place upon the command of his father, Amun-Re, King of the gods. There came the royal herald Amunedjeh to see this pyramid. The Brewer and those of bread [production], … m-pet, Amenhotep, the Scribe Mentuhotep, the Scribe Djehutimhet, Humesh, traces of names and a title [scribe?]

…. ȝbd 2 r' 2……., nsw bity (mn ḫpr r') sȝ r' (dḥwty-ms nfr- ḫprw) 'nḫ ḏt m nḥḥ ist ḥm.f ḥr ḏȝhi…, t3.w fnḫw ḫbḫb ȝȝw ḥr st sn ḥr wḏ it.f imn r' nsw nṯrw iwt pw ir n wḥm nswt ȝmw nḏḥ r mȝȝ mr pn pȝ 'tḥ.w ḫn' nȝ n ḥr…..imn-ḥtp sš mntw ḥtp sš ḏhwty m ḥ't ….., sš
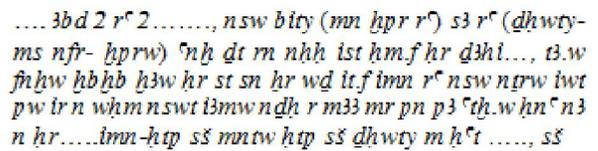
In addition, it appears in the pyramid complex of Senfru at Meidum (Petrie, 1892).

ȝȝt-sp 30 ḥr ḥmn nsw bity (nb m't r'), sȝ r' (imn ḥtpw ḥkȝ wȝst) 'nḫ ḏt m nḥḥ, m šm' wsḥ m tȝ pn r-ḏr.f iwt pw ir n sš m'y r mȝȝ s mr 'ȝ wr ḥr bȝ (snfr)
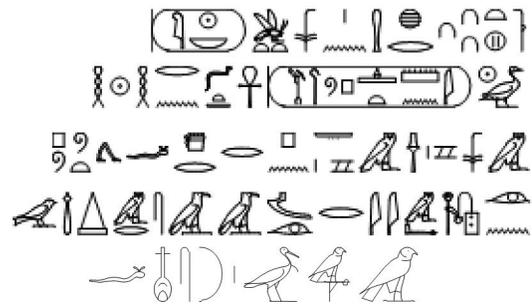
Year 30 under the majesty of the king Neb-maat-Ra, son of the sun Amenhotep III ,prince of Thebes, living forever and name to eternity as king established in this whole land. The scribe Mai came to see the very great pyramid of Horus the soul? ofSeneferu.

7. Results

The Hieratic graffiti of the 18th and 19th Dynasties represent "The Golden Age of Egyptian graffiti", and they were left in more places than in any other era. Graffiti are considered one of the sources for studying Egyptian history and they provide another perspective for observing the culture and social identity promoted in literary works.

Graffiti divided into two types: A. Religious texts such as religious hymns, adorations to the divinities, Htp di nsw formulae; B. Commemorative texts, such as worker texts, visitor texts, dating texts. As for paleography, there are two types, pictographic and petroglyphic.

The Hieratic graffiti of the 18th and 19th Dynasties can be characterized by a group of features, they are: 1) unofficial writings and drawings, 2) based on appropriation of space, 3) written with ink or scratched, 4) do not reflect the political or economic situation, but express the religious situation and private life, 5) depend on a fixed writing system, 6) interact directly with other decoration and 7) provide us with information about their authors.

Graffiti may be informal texts, but there is no evidence for the prohibition of graffiti, whereas most Hieratic graffiti contains the name of the author. The author of the graffiti in TT.36 asks visitors to read the writing, making them circulate. Graffitists wrote in the empty places, respecting the placement of epigraphy. Additionally, the subject of some of the graffiti was royal orders, like that found in the tomb of Thutmosis IV.

The scribes of graffiti usually introduced themselves simply as 'scribes' and did not indicate what institution they belonged to. They were sometimes well-known as high officials. In this context, the word sS would rather mean 'literate', in reference to the ability to read and write, rather than the administrative function of a scribe. The authors/scribes of graffiti may have learned the different forms and formulae used in writing graffiti in a school or archive.

There were many reasons for writing graffiti, such as responding to the deceased's wish to encourage the visitors of his tomb or chapel to take part in his funerary cult, appropriation of space, adoration to the gods, and information giving.

Graffiti which appeared in the tomb and temple were placed on the wall of the entrance passage, the first room of the tomb and in the first hall. As for Theban graffiti, it is concentrated under shade-giving ledges.

Acknowledgements

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