



Work Commitment in Middle and New Kingdom Texts

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Abstract

Work commitment is intensely emphasized in the context of work and positive characteristic traits from the Middle and the New kingdoms. The texts hint at traits that were overall perceived as the socially recognized ideal conduct in work atmosphere. The texts constitute a catalogue of how committed and disciplined employees, officials and workers were, making it possible to better understand work values and ethics in the Middle and the New Kingdoms. The subject even sheds light on other related factors such as co-workers, workplace, mastering skills and work conditions. Only rare attestations expressing work commitment are encountered in tomb scenes from the Middle and the New Kingdoms. Nonetheless, exchanged dialogues in the featured workshops and fields should have been inspired from real life. The research is therefore an approach to aspects of the topic of labour in ancient Egypt, with associated sources of information from the Middle and the New Kingdoms.

Introduction

Ancient Egypt revealed accurate records including work reports listing workers organized as crews and crew leaders,¹ lists naming workmen as absentees, together with reasons for absence from work.² Housing settlements for the labourers were further organised for construction projects and tomb building.³ Also existing are records of remuneration,⁴ labour needs and obligations.⁵

¹ W. Helck, "Arbeitsabteilungen und -organisation", in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ I* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 371-374. Examples are common from Deir el-Medineh. J. Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*, BdE 50, 3rd edition (Cairo, 2004), 99-105, 121-132, 231-243.

² Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*, 247; Jac. Janssen, "Absence from Work by the Necropolis Workmen of Thebes," *SAK* 8 (1980), 128, 129.

³ W. Helck, "Arbeitersiedlung", in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ I* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 374-375.

⁴ R. A. Caminos, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, Brown Egyptological Studies 1 (London, 1954), 30, 220; P. Kaplony, "Die Handwerker als Kulturträger Altägyptens", *Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asien-Gesellschaft* 20 (1966), 114.

⁵ W. Helck, "Arbeiterversorgung und -entlohnung", in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ I* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 375-376.

Starting from the Old Kingdom on, the texts even highlight the importance of finishing the required work on time.⁶ Material from the Old Kingdom on devotion to work give information implicitly highlighting parallel significance.⁷ The completion of due work was valued, and hence often recorded since the Old Kingdom. An example is the stela of the Dakhla oasis governor *hnty k3w Ppy* (actually at the Charga Museum, nr. 34), recording that parts of his mastaba tomb were constructed only in a few months, due to the efforts of the work crew.⁸ Conversely, dereliction of duties was sometimes noted. Such a behaviour was not to be tolerated, and workers were reported for neglect of duties or redundancy to work.⁹

A previous research conducted on Old Kingdom tomb scenes has allowed a detailed analysis of several aspects reflecting work ambiance and workers' attitudes towards rejection of laziness during the Old Kingdom.¹⁰ The texts similarly highlighted how they were keen to express being actively engaged at work. Work commitment was similarly intensely emphasized in the context of work and positive characteristic traits from the Middle and the New kingdoms, prompting to entail the actual study on the subject.

Subject of the current study are texts from the Middle and the New Kingdoms; thus adding to the significance of the information from the Old Kingdom. Hence the significance of the research, especially that it is not only concentrated on tomb scenes; the texts from the Middle and the New Kingdoms are further recorded on varied sources (papyri, ostraca and stelae).

The texts hint at traits that were overall perceived as the socially recognized ideal conduct in work atmosphere. The overall tone is insisting on the characteristic dedication to work; echoing criteria for the devoted official and/ or worker, and accordingly entailing expressions of loyalty. Topics of self presentation were elaborated during the Eleventh and the Twelfth Dynasties.¹¹ Several of the Middle and New Kingdom sources were frequently connected with the themes of one's abilities

⁶ P. Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée dans les tombeaux égyptiens de l'Ancien Empire*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'université de Strasbourg 24 (Strasbourg, 1925), 202, 203, (2, 3); N. Strudwick, *The administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom: the highest titles and their holders* (London, 1985), 116, 117.

⁷ Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée*, 203, (9, 10); A. Erman, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches*, APAW 15 (Berlin, 1919), 18; H. Grapow, *Wie die alten Ägypter sich anredeten, wie sie sich grüssten und wie sie miteinander sprachen*, APAW 4 (Berlin, 1939-1943); W. Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf altägyptischen Darstellungen der Landwirtschaft, Viehzucht, des Fisch- und Vogelfangs vom Mittleren Reich bis zur Spätzeit*, TÄB 1 (Bonn, 1973), 37.

⁸ The stele was originally in his mastaba. J. Osing, et. al., *Denkmäler der Oase Dachla – Aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry*, *Archäologische Veröffentlichungen* 28 (Mainz am Rhein, 1982), 29, pl. 6, 60.

⁹ Among the documents studied is document (3.8) O DeM 328: KRI III, p. 535.

¹⁰ R. Y. Merzeban, "Tired workers in Old Kingdom daily life scenes?", *MDAIK* 63 (2007), 225-246.

¹¹ J.J. Clère and J. Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, BAeg 10 (Brussels, 1948), § 23, 24; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom: A Study and an Anthology*, OBO 84 (Freiburg, 1988), 98-99; M. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120 (Freiburg, 1992), 23-26.

and competence,¹² as a means to perpetuating willingness and identity.¹³ The studied textual corpus from the Middle and New Kingdoms constitutes a catalogue of how committed and disciplined employees, officials and workers were, making it possible to better understand work values and ethics. The subject sheds light on other related factors such as co-workers, workplace, mastering skills and work conditions.

Real and ideal are both explored in the textual material. Affirmation of hard work appears to be a preoccupation, and officials as well as workers left inscriptions proudly acknowledging their hard work and skillfulness.¹⁴ Whether belonging to the higher class or being of a modest status, all were keen to express their commitment to work.¹⁵

Only rare attestations expressing work commitment were encountered in tomb scenes from the Middle and the New Kingdoms. Nonetheless, the dialogues in the featured workshops and fields should have been inspired from real life. The research is therefore an approach to aspects of the topic of labour in ancient Egypt, with associated sources of information from the Middle and the New Kingdoms. The investigation extends to officials, the entire category of workers, labourers and lower-class servants. In this context the research is not limited to certain categories, nor to specific activities or duties. Furthermore, the question arises whether work commitment was a real sentiment evoked by workers, or an aimed-at medium of tomb owners' peculiarities.

Textual corpus

Within the framework of such contexts, information on devotion to work in the current study was compiled and analyzed from a textual corpus including Middle and New kingdom sources. The documentation included excerpts from varied sources as follows:

- Texts in tomb scenes
- Private letters on papyri
- High officials' self-laudatory *cursus honorum*¹⁶
- Ostraca

The texts on stelae are substantially different from those encountered in tomb scenes or in private letters. While the former is the type of traditional routine formulae, the

¹² An example is the stela of *Ttj* (BM EA 614): Clère and Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, § 15.

¹³ An example is the stela of *Ti hr nfrt* (Berlin 1204): Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 98-99.

¹⁴ E. Hornung, "Wege zum altägyptischen Menschen", in: Hommages à Fayza Haikal, *BdE 138* (Cairo, 2003), 135; H. Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti*, Fascicule III, La chapelle, deuxième partie, MIFAO 65 (1953), pl. CLIII; Erman, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches*, 23.

¹⁵ Erman, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches*, 23, 24; R. Drenkhahn, *Die Handwerker und ihre Tätigkeiten im Alten Ägypten*, ÄA 31 (Wiesbaden, 1976); R. Drenkhahn, "Handwerker", in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ II* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 949, 950.

¹⁶ Biographies on stelae were means by which officials wished to fulfil the desire to make their names endure for ever. In the Eleventh Dynasty they placed their stelae in the Theban area, while in the Twelfth Dynasty stelae were placed in Abydos. R. Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember: Egyptian biographical texts on Middle Kingdom stelae* (Prague, 2011), 100.

later vary considerably, and tomb scenes often include humouristically uttered dialogues. It is not surprising that such scenes reflect humour as the workers seemed to be heavily engaged either in workshops or in the fields. A normal aspect would be to lighten the work atmosphere with bits of wit and fun.¹⁷

Especially characteristic of tomb scenes are the contexts revealed by investigating the interactive aspect among the persons depicted. Exchanged dialogues often refer to being diligent at work; demonstrating how individuals report that tasks were perfectly accomplished (i.e. as is wished, on time).¹⁸ An example in the tomb of Antefoker reads $\overline{\text{ir}}\overline{\text{y}}(\text{i}) (\text{r}) \text{hst.k}$ '(I) do (as) you wish'.¹⁹ Besides, the texts in the scenes are often suggested to form refrains of motivational songs, prompting colleagues to excel at work.²⁰

Real and Ideal

Texts on stelae, in private letters and in tomb scenes render the distinction between ideal concepts and real work atmosphere possible. The vocabulary and terminology through which the theme was conveyed could impact on the understanding of work conditions. It is possible to recognize declared dedication to work. The expressions allow broadening the notion of work commitment beyond standardized criteria.

The identification of these communicative messages is to a certain extent impressive; relying often on exaggeration in stating opposites (e.g. working by day and by night) and combining elements of sensations (e.g. working with heart and mind).²¹ Such expressions denote that the fully and perfectly devoted persona was the typical model.

A large variety in the choice of vocabulary is encountered, whether uttered by important officials or workers in the fields and workshops. Work commitment was

¹⁷ B. v. d. Walle, "Humor", in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ III* (Wiesbaden, 1980), 75, 76; P. F. Houlihan, *Wit & humour in ancient Egypt* (London, 2001), 41-43.

¹⁸ Examples from the Old Kingdom include scenes from Saqqara in the tombs of *Ty*, *Nfr irt n.f*, *R^c špss*, *Ny ʿnh Hnmw* and *Hnmw ḥtp*: Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti*, III, pl. CLII; B. v. d. Walle, *Le mastaba de Neferirtenef aux Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire à Bruxelles* (Brussels, 1930), 57, pl. 12; Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée*, 202, 203, 2, 3; Strudwick, *The administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom*, 116 - 117; H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep*, AV 21 (Mainz, 1977), 131, Sz. 29.2.1, Tf. 58. An example from Giza is the text from the tomb of *K3 ḥi.f*: H. Junker, *Gîza VI*, Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 1943, 72/1 (Leipzig, 1943), Abb. 43. Examples include as well the tomb of *D^cw* at Deir el Gebrawi: N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir el Gebrawi II*, ASE 12 (London, 1902), 7, pl. VI.

¹⁹ N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Antefoker, Vizier of Sesostri I, and of His Wife Sennet*, TTS II (London, 1920), pl. IX.

²⁰ Erman, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches*, 22; E. Brunner-Traut, "Arbeitslieder", in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *LÄ I* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 378-385; J. J. Tylor, F. L. Griffith, *Ahnas el Medineh (Heracleopolis Magna): with Chapters on Mendes, the Nome of Thot, and Leontopolis / The Tomb of Paheri at El Kab*, MEEF 11 (London, 1894), pl. III; N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Rē^c at Thebes*, MMA XI (New York, 1973), pl. 45.

²¹ These traits are obvious in some of the documents studied: example (2.4) Stele of *Ini-iti.f* (Louvre C 168): H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung* (Wiesbaden, 1991), 160; example (2.8) pBritish Museum 10375: Černy, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 46, vs. 1; and example (3.3) Tomb-chapel of *df3(i) ḥ^cpy* in Assiut: H. Junker, *Zu einigen Reden und Rufen auf Grabbildern des Alten Reiches*, SAWW 221, Band 5 (Leipzig, 1943), 15.

repeatedly expressed by officials of lower status to ensure they follow their superiors' commands and efficiently perform the duties assigned to them. The same meaning seems to be uttered in a way by workers in tomb scenes in the form of exchanged dialogues. Senior officials were equally keen to include similar sentence patterns in their auto/biographies.

The texts further reflect the privilege of being knowledgeable, experimented, effective and skillful. Praising one's ability to bring tasks into completion and being actively engaged in work were the preoccupation of workers and officials at all levels. These characteristic traits constitute an integrated part of self definition.²²

Professional concerns and work conditions

Having a functional role, the inscriptions should have been emphasizing the notion of self in inscriptional evidence.²³ This allows exploring character portraits of workers in ancient Egypt. The textual study assessing how committed workers were, sheds light on their influential behavioral attitudes. This has resulted in a comprehensive review of work ethics and standards as reflected by tomb dialogues and texts on stelae. Besides, information is given about different classes of workers operating on all levels.

The texts highlight professional concerns of not wasting time, spending hours working nonstop, doing what is necessary, etc. Interestingly, Middle and New Kingdom tomb scenes remarkably often reflect work conditions. The tomb of *P3 hry* at El-Kab includes exceptionally varied expressions denoting workers' diligence. Working in difficult conditions were additionally often revealed. Workers expressed their perseverance despite the heavy burdens they had to carry while transporting corn on board of a ship.²⁴ The utterance of one of the workers in a grain harvesting scene, denotes that the sun is hot.²⁵ Conversely, in several tomb scenes there are texts expressing that the weather is good *hrw nfr*, hence allowing good working conditions.²⁶

²² J. Assmann, "Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture", in P. Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, Volume I (Boston, 1996), 56; Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 23-26.

²³ For the idea of self-thematization: Assmann, "Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture", 56.

²⁴ Tylor, *Paheri*, pl. III; W. Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf altägyptischen Darstellungen der Landwirtschaft, Viehzucht, des Fisch- und Vogelfangs vom Mittleren Reich bis zur Spätzeit*, TÄB 1 (Bonn, 1973), 77, 78.

²⁵ Tylor, *Paheri*, pl. III; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 43, 44. To be compared with the parallel inscription in the tomb of *dhwtj Nht* at El-Bersheh (nr. 1). F.L. Griffith and P. E. Newberry, *El Bersheh II*, ASEG 4 (London, 1894), pl. 8; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 38.

²⁶ Guglielmi suggests such texts to be song refrains. Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 18. Examples are the ploughing scenes in the tomb of Pahery at El-Kab (Tylor, *Paheri*, pl. III); and that of Senefer (nr. 96 a) at Thebes. *Urk.* IV, 1419; E. Brunner-Traut, "Arbeitslieder", 382.

The texts also give information about the status in the workplace. Indiscipline among workmen was not common; yet with exceptions associated to complaints.²⁷ Papyrus Geneva D 187 (vs 1-5)²⁸ is a letter that concerns a workman who has been neglecting his work duties. *A contrario*, other sources exemplify strong commitment to work. In Ostrakon CGC 25785, (r 1-2) the workman *Mry Shmt*'s attitude is praised for his strong commitment to work ethics.²⁹

Several strategies were adopted to confirm how exceeding at work they were willing to be. The texts are analyzed according to the following contexts.

1. Praise of work
2. Exceeding at work
3. Working uninterruptedly
4. Affirming competence

1. Praise of work

Texts enhancing and praising hard work were recorded, yet not quite frequently. Following are excerpts from Middle and New Kingdom sources.

The importance of not wasting time was highlighted in the Maxims of *Pth htp* as follows.

1.1. pPrisse, 7,9 (Teaching for *Pth htp*)

Date: Middle Kingdom³⁰



šms ib.k tr n wnn.k

m ir ḥ3w ḥr mdwt

m ḥb³² tr ḥn šms ib

bwt³³ k3 pw

²⁷ A. Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents* (London, 1948), 52:14-53:3; B. G. Davies, *Genealogies and Personality Characteristics of the Workmen in the Deir el-Medina Community during the Ramesside Period* (phD diss., University of Liverpool, 1996), 414-416.

²⁸ E. F. Wente, *Late Ramesside Letters*, SAOC 33, (Chicago, 1967), 57-58.

²⁹ Davies, *Genealogies and Personality Characteristics*, 414.

³⁰ The dating of the composition is possibly attributed to the late Sixth Dynasty or the Twelfth Dynasty, whereas the papyrus is dated to the Middle Kingdom. See W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies and Poetry* (Cairo, 2003), 129.

³¹ Z. Zába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague, 1956), 30, 31.

³² Also with the meaning 'reduce, lessen': *Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 187.

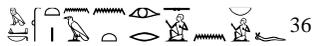
³³ Also 'detest': *Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 82.

Follow your heart the time that you live, do not do more than³⁴ what is said. Do not waste the time of following the heart, (for it is) an annoyance of the spirit.”³⁵

1.2. *ḥk3-nḥt* letter I, vs 9

Date: Eleventh Dynasty

The letter is written from *ḥk3-nḥt* to his son, urging him to constantly work and not to waste time. The latter seems to be in charge of the household during *ḥk3-nḥt*'s absence.



mk rnpt n3 nt ir s n nb.f

Behold, this is a year belonging (to) a man (who) works for his master.³⁷

1.3. O. BM 41541, 4-5 (Instructions of *Imn-nḥt*)³⁸

Date: New Kingdom.³⁹



*ndm sp-2 gm s ip m k3t nbt*⁴¹

It is very fine to find a man able in every work.

1.4. Hymn to the Aten, Tomb of Eye

Date: Eighteenth Dynasty



ḥꜥ.k t3 r-dr.f ir.sn k3t.sn

(When) you (the sun) rise, the entire land, they perform their work.

2. Exceeding at work

The dominating form of expressing devotion to work was the excessive use of demonstrating that work was nonstop. Exaggerations included conveying that workers

³⁴ For *ir ḥ3w ḥr*: Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 161.

³⁵ Compare Simpson, *Literature*, 135.

³⁶ T.G.H. James, *The Hekanakhte Papers and Other Early Middle Kingdom Documents*, MMA XIX (New York, 1962), pl. 3A.

³⁷ Cf. James, *The Hekanakhte Papers*, 14.

³⁸ The instructions of Amunnakht were reproduced in seven parallel versions on ostraca: O. BM 41541, O. Grdseloff, O. Cairo (unnumbered), O. DM 1248 + O. Brux. E. 6444, O. DM 1249, O. DM 1596 and O. Munich 396. S. Bickel and B. Mathieu, “L’écivain Amennakht et son enseignement”, *BIFAO* 93 (1993), 31-51.

³⁹ The composition of the text is dated to the Eighteenth Dynasty, and the manuscript does not postdate the Ramesside period. Simpson, *Literature*, 221.

⁴⁰ Bickel and Mathieu, “L’écivain Amennakht et son enseignement”, pl. 2.

⁴¹ Cf. the translation “homme compétent dans n'importe quel travail”. G. Posener, “L’exorde de l’instruction éducative d’Amennakhte”, *Rde* 10 (1955), 66. Also to be compared is the translation “homme compétent dans tous les domaines”. Bickel and Mathieu, “L’écivain Amennakht et son enseignement”, 35.

⁴² N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*. Part 6: *Tombs of Parennefer, Tutu and Ay*, ASEg 18 (London, 1908), pl. XXVII, 5.

In *T^h ms'* letter, he was questioning why the female slave who was with him has been taken away and given to another.



in-iw nn ink p3y.k b3k hr sdm wpwt.k m grḥ mi hrw

Am I not your servant, listening to your commands by night as well as by day?⁵⁹

2.7. O 834, verso

Date: Twentieth Dynasty (Year two of Ramesses IV (?))

Provenance: Deir el-Medineh, Kôm of the great well.⁶¹

The text on the verso of the ostrakon describes the workers as doing their work effectively.



[...] *b3kw*⁶³ *m šs*⁶⁴

[(*m* ?)] *p3 ḏw pw bw*⁶⁵ *irtw*

*p3 gnn*⁶⁶

[...] working diligently [(in?)] the mountain without manifesting fatigue.⁶⁷

2.8. pBritish Museum 10375

Date: Late Ramesside

The late Ramesside letter is written by the scribe of the Necropolis *Bw-thi-Imn*,⁶⁸ relating how the workmen of the Necropolis under his supervision reacted. After having read the letter received from the royal scribe *P3y ḥnh* to them, they said:

⁵⁹ V. W. Spiegelberg, "Ein Brief des Schreibers Amasis aus der Zeit des Thutmosiden", *ZÄS* 55 (1918), 85; T. E. Peet, "Two Eighteenth Dynasty Letters. Papyrus Louvre 3230", *JEA* XII (1926), pl. XVII.

⁶⁰ Peet, "Two Eighteenth Dynasty Letters. Papyrus Louvre 3230", 71; E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, Writings from the Ancient World 1 (Atlanta, 1990), 92. Cf. pAnastasi IV, 8.8.

⁶¹ P. Grandet, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médîneh. Tome IX. Nos 831-1000*, *DFIFAO* 41 (Cairo, 2003), 15.

⁶² Grandet, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médîneh*, 203 (O. 834, verso).

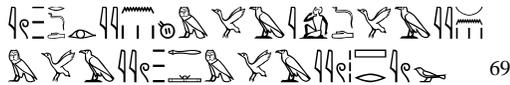
⁶³ The signs  and  were used as determinatives for *b3k* in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties; the word *b3k* especially refers to difficult corporal work. *Wb* I, 426, 4 "Arbeiten insbesondere von schwerer körperlicher Arbeit".

⁶⁴ *Wb* IV, 542, 6  *m šs*: "in gutem Zustand". Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 248 *mi ššrw* "well, in good order".

⁶⁵ *bw* as negation: *Wb* I, 453, 1.

⁶⁶ *Wb* V, 175, 20 "Swäche, Schwachheit". The word *gnn* can also be rendered "weakness". R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1988), 290.

⁶⁷ Grandet (*Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médîneh*, 15.) translates "Ils travaillent fermement dans la montagne, sans avoir encore manifesté de fatigue."



iw r-dd iry.n sp-sn m p3 idd p3y nb.n
m p3y.w 3 m p3y.w šryw

They said, “We will do, we will do according to what our lord has said,” the oldest and the youngest.⁷⁰

On the verso of the same papyrus, the workmen of the Necropolis said they were working “with all their heart and mind”; ensuring that they were accomplishing all commissions.⁷¹



inn bn⁷³ ir.n b3kw⁷⁴ n.k m h3ty.n

We do not work for you with our heart(s).⁷⁵

3. Working uninterruptedly

Several sources record that negligence was typically and constantly denied.⁷⁶ Trying to impress their superiors, workers were keen to deny laziness.

3.1. Tomb of *Snbi* (B nr. 1), Meir

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Amenemhat I)

In a sowing scene, the youth driving the yoke of oxen tends to break. He calls the ploughman behind him to stop for a pause, while the later reminds him of their duty to plough (Fig. 1).⁷⁷



⁶⁸ H. Ranke, *Die Aegyptischen Personennamen. Bd I. Verzeichnis der Namen* (Glückstadt, 1935), 94, 20.

⁶⁹ J. Černý, *Late Ramesside Letters*, BiAeg 9 (Brussels, 1939), 45, r. 14.

⁷⁰ Cf. Wenté, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 60.

⁷¹ D. Sweeney, “Idiolects in the Late Ramesside Letters”, in A. Loprieno (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Egyptian Grammar (Crossroads III)*, Yale, 4-9 April 1994, LingAeg 4 (Göttingen, 1994), 298.

⁷² Černý, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 46, vs. 1.

⁷³ For *bn* used as negation: *Wb* I, 456, 6.

⁷⁴ The word *b3k* was determined with the papyrus roll  since the Middle Kingdom. In the Eighteenth Dynasty the sign of the man striking with a stick  is mostly replaced by the sign . Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 444, A24; *Wb* I, 426, 3-4; 427, 13.

⁷⁵ Cf. Wenté, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 61.

⁷⁶ An example is a Saqqara relief fragment, dated to the Tenth Dynasty. W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, Teil III: Gräber des Alten Reiches (bearbeitet von H. Schäfer) (Leipzig, 1936), 112, Tf. 55 B; *PM* III², 564; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 36, 37.

⁷⁷ A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir. Volume I. The Tomb-Chapel of Ukh-Hotep's son Senbi*, ASEg 22 (London, 1914), 29, 30, pl. III; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 11.

⁷⁸ Blackman, *Meir* I, pl. III.

imi 3bt⁷⁹ nfr hrw⁸⁰

Come, cease, the day is nice.

To which the ploughman replies:



iw.f hr.s⁸¹

It is (i.e. nice) because of it (i.e. because of the ploughing).

3.2. Tomb-chapel of *Snt* (TT 60), Thebes

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senusert I)

A brewing scene shows a young boy tending a bowl to the brewer, claiming hunger and asking for *srmt* ‘food’.⁸² The answer appears to be particularly humouristic as the boy seems not to be suffering from hunger. The brewer, apparently triggered for being interrupted, answers that he eats more than a royal slave at the plough (Fig. 2).⁸³



mk tw g[r]t [wi m] b3k

Behold, you are stopping [me from] work.⁸⁴

3.3. Tomb-chapel of *df3(.i) h'py* (nr. 1), Assiut

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senusert I)



isst pw wb3 m hwt.f⁸⁵

Who is the one who is heartedly⁸⁶ (i.e. entirely involved) in his work?⁸⁷

⁷⁹ *Wb* I, p. 6, 2. *3b*: “aufhören, eine Pause machen”. In the original text in Fig. 1, traces of the walking legs are distinguishable following *m*, although it is the determinative for *3bt* and should be at the end of the word, not preceding it. A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir. Volume I. The Tomb-Chapel of Ukh-Hotep's son Senbi*, ASEg 22 (London, 1914), pl. III. The attestations in the *Berlin Wörterbuch* are recorded as and .

⁸⁰ The expression is to be compared with a parallel in the flax harvest scene pictured in the tomb of Senbi (B Nr. 1) at Meir. Blackman, *Meir* I, pl. III; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 54, 55.

⁸¹ The intended meaning of the suffix pronoun *.s* is probably ‘because of the ploughing’.

⁸² Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 236.

⁸³ Davies, *The Tomb of Antefoqer*, 15, pl. XI.

⁸⁴ Davies, *The Tomb of Antefoqer*, 16; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 86; Houlihan, *Wit & humour in ancient Egypt*, 41.

⁸⁵ Junker, *Zu einigen Reden und Rufen auf Grabbildern des Alten Reiches*, 15.

⁸⁶ My suggestion of the translation ‘heartedly’ entails the meaning of being fully present. However, the translation of *wb3* remains obscure. Cf. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 58; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 54.

⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that this type of questions was frequently addressed by overseers in Old Kingdom tomb scenes to workers as a reminder prompting them to work more actively. Erman, *Reden, Rufe und*

3.4. Tomb of P3 ḥry, El-Kab

Date: Eighteenth Dynasty

In the agricultural scene (Fig. 3),⁸⁸ one of the workers dares to express his challenge by saying:



ir in.k n.i 11,009 ink shm⁸⁹ st

If you bring me 11,009 (bundle of flax), I will comb them.⁹⁰

To his utterance, the answer (most probably of the overseer) was:



3s.tw m ir ʿš3 r p3 i3w⁹¹ i3s⁹² n ihwtw⁹³

Hurry up, do not talk too much, old bald-headed field-worker.⁹⁴

3.5. Tomb of P3 ḥry, El-Kab

Date: Eighteenth Dynasty

In scenes showing agricultural activities, peasants were eager to boast more energy at work. A painted relief at the tomb of P3 ḥry shows peasants ploughing by hand and digging with hoes. One of the hoers expresses his motivation to excel at work (Fig. 4).⁹⁵



iw.i r irt ḥ3w⁹⁶ ḥr b3kw n p3 sr ḥr.w⁹⁷

I will do more work than (what) the official requires.⁹⁸

His colleague unexpectedly reminds him that they need to go home early; a possible remark to stop talking and continue to work to be able to finish on time.

3.6. pBerlin 10463, vs 2-3

Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches, 24; Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée*, 202, 1; Junker, *Zu einigen Reden und Rufen auf Grabbildern des Alten Reiches*, 11.

⁸⁸ Tylor, *Paheri*, pl. III.

⁸⁹ *Wb* IV, p. 269, 12 “Flachs kämmen”; Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 244.

⁹⁰ Houlihan, *Wit & humour in ancient Egypt*, 41.

⁹¹ The text dates from the Eighteenth Dynasty, and  is the abbreviated form of the word  *i3w*, attested in the New Kingdom. *Wb* I, 28, 3.

⁹² Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 9. Variants of the word *i3s* ‘bald’ appear as , , , .

⁹³  var. of *ʿhwty* ‘cultivator’. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 29.

⁹⁴ Cf. Houlihan, *Wit & humour in ancient Egypt*, 41; Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 55.

⁹⁵ Tylor, *Paheri*, pl. III.

⁹⁶ *Wb* III, p. 16, 7, 10; Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, p. 161 *r(di) ḥ3w ḥr* ‘do more than’, ‘exceed’.

⁹⁷ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 203.

⁹⁸ Houlihan, *Wit & Humour in Ancient Egypt*, 42, 43, fig. 38.

Date: mid-Eighteenth Dynasty (Amenhotep II)

The papyrus includes a letter addressed from *Sn nfr*, governor of Thebes, to the tenant-farmer in the Upper Egyptian sistrum nome *B3ki*.⁹⁹ The language of the letter clearly shows that it is addressed from a high-ranking official to an inferior. Besides containing no opening greeting, *Sn nfr* informs *B3ki* of his arrival, ordering him to execute a number of tasks. He does not miss to tell him that he is well aware of his lazy habits.¹⁰⁰



101

b^c b^c¹⁰² imi.k b3gt¹⁰³ r-ntt tw.i rh.kwi r-dd

ntk wi(3)wi(3)¹⁰⁴ mr.k im m sdr¹⁰⁵

Watch out! you shall not be remiss since I know that you are lethargic and enjoy eating while lying down.¹⁰⁶

3.7. Tomb of *Mry mry*, Memphis

Date: Nineteenth Dynasty

The text is an utterance attributed to the ploughman urging the cattle to constantly plough. Guglielmi¹⁰⁷ suggests that his utterance is seemingly a song, starting by praising the good weather; a good reason to plough (Fig. 5).¹⁰⁸



nwt htp(.w) m wrd ib¹⁰⁹ m sk3 n m3^c

The sky being fair, do not be tired at due ploughing.

3.8. O DeM 328

Date: Nineteenth Dynasty (Ramesses II)

Provenance: Deir el-Medineh

⁹⁹ R. A. Caminos, "Papyrus Berlin 10463", *JEA* 49 (1963), 31, pl. VIA, r 1.

¹⁰⁰ Caminos, "Papyrus Berlin 10463", 35.

¹⁰¹ Caminos, "Papyrus Berlin 10463", pl. VIA.

¹⁰² *b^c b^c* used as interjection. *Wb* I, 446, 1, 2 "Pass auf".

¹⁰³ *Wb* I, 431, 2, 5; Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ *Wb* I, 272, 10. Caminos, "Papyrus Berlin 10463", 35. *wi3wi3* as a 6-lit. adjective verb formed by reduplication. Cf. the occurrence on the Berlin-Glasgow ostrakon: J. Černý and A. Gardiner, *Hieratic ostraca I* (Oxford, 1957).

pl. 42 (4 rt. 2, vs 2).

¹⁰⁵ *m sdr* might also mean 'while being inactive, at rest'. Caminos, "Papyrus Berlin 10463", 35.

¹⁰⁶ Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, 93. To be compared with the translation: "now mind, you shall not slack, for I know that you are sluggish and fond of eating lying down". Caminos, "Papyrus Berlin 10463", 31.

¹⁰⁷ Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ P. A. Boeser, *Beschreibung der Ägyptischen Sammlung des Niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden IV, Die Denkmäler des Neuen Reiches, Erster Abteilung, Gräber* (Leiden, 1911), Taf. XVIII.

¹⁰⁹ For *wrd ib* "müde werden": *Wb* I, 338, 4, b.

The papyrus is a letter sent from the scribe *P3 b3ki* to his father, the draughtsman *M33 n nht.f*. The former complains that *Tb* has been taken on with him as a co-worker at his father's request. The worker *Tb* was reported for he was apparently wasting time while spending the day bringing the jar of water.¹¹⁰



111

*sdm(.i) n p3 dd ir.n.k n.i imi*¹¹² *b3kw Tb hn.c.k hr ptri wrš.f*¹¹³ *iw.f hr in t3 inht*¹¹⁴ *mw*

(I) obeyed¹¹⁵ what you said to me: 'Let *Tb* work together with you!' Now look, he spends the day bringing the jar of water.

4. Affirming competence

Officials were keen to complementing skills by thematising devotion to work with competence. Being knowledgeable and skilful are the major traits reflected in the sources. The majority of these examples are related to officials' biographies. At least if the texts are not to be regarded as commemorative, they are recognized as character traits of the good behavior catalogue.

The closely related themes of being experienced and knowledgeable were also associated with dedication to work. On his stela Cairo JE 41437,¹¹⁶ the Overseer of Scouts *d3ri* claims that the ruler caused him to fare down to acquire sustenance of barley 'because his words were knowledgeable, and his speaking was beautiful'.¹¹⁷

The topics included speaking abilities and listening skills as well. Besides claiming capability in their office *kn m i3wt.f* 'one efficient in his office',¹¹⁸ Stelae owners quiet expectedly equally affirmed their restraint from doing evil or causing harm to people (4.1, 4.2, 4,5).

4.1. Stela of *hny* (Moscow, Pushkin Museum I.i.a. 1137 a, b)

Date: Eleventh Dynasty (Intef II)

Provenance: Thebes, El-Tarif



n-sp iwt ht im n-3t n rh(.i) ht

¹¹⁰ A. G. McDowell, *Village life in ancient Egypt: Laundry lists and love songs* (Oxford, 1999), 29.

¹¹¹ *KRI* III, p. 535.

¹¹² *Wb* I, 77, 8.

¹¹³ *Wb* I, 335, 10.

¹¹⁴ *Wb* I, 99, 15.

¹¹⁵ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 259 *sdm n* 'obey'.

¹¹⁶ The stela dates to Intef II, and its provenance is his Theban tomb at Dra Abu El-Naga. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Clère and Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, § 14; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 40, 41.

¹¹⁸ An example is the stela of *Ini it.f ikr* (Leiden V 3), dated to the Twelfth Dynasty. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 73.

¹¹⁹ Clère and Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, § 17; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 4.

rh(.i) ht

(I) was a knower of things.

4.4. Stela of *Ini-iti.f* (BM EA 1203)

Date: Eleventh Dynasty

Provenance: Thebes



rh r rhw

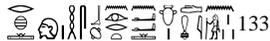
(I was one) who knew more than the knower.

On his stela (MMA 57.95)¹³² *Ini-iti.f* similarly recorded having been appointed in the Heracleopolitan nome, and being the Treasury of the earliest time because of being *rh ht* ‘a knower of things’.

4.5. Stela of *Rdi.w hnmw* (Cairo CG 20543)

Date: Eleventh Dynasty (reign of Wahankh Intef II)

Provenance: his tomb at Dendera (UE 6)



rh tp-hsb¹³⁴ n irt n^{cc} ib¹³⁵ dmi n srw

(One) who knows the norm of conduct, balanced of heart, who is joined¹³⁶ by officials.

On the same stela *Rdi.w hnmw* further states how experienced he was; the fact that prevented any (bad) thing to occur.



n-(sp) iit ht nb(t) im n c3t¹³⁸ nt rh(.i) ht

¹³⁰ Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 16, (3).

¹³¹ Clère and Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, § 23; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 24, (10).

¹³² H. G. Fischer, “An Example of Memphite Influence in a Theban Stela of the Eleventh Dynasty”, *Artibus Asiae*, Ascona 22 (1959), 240-242; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 49-52; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 28, (2).

¹³³ H. O. Lange and H. Schäfer, *Grab und Denksteine des Mittleren Reichs in Museum von Kairo II*, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire (Nr. 20400-20780) (Berlin, 1908), 164-167; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 42-44; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 74, (4).

¹³⁴ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 297.

¹³⁵ For *n^{cc} ib*: *Wb II*, 208, 9.

¹³⁶ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 313.

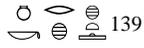
¹³⁷ Lange and Schäfer, *Grab und Denksteine des Mittleren Reichs in Museum von Kairo II*, 164-167; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 42-44; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 74, (12, 13).

There never came a thing (i.e. a bad thing) greatly therein, for (I) was a knower of things.

4.6. Stela of *Rwd ḥꜥw* (BM EA 159)

Date: late Eleventh Dynasty

Provenance: Abydos



ink rh ht

I was a knower of things.

4.7. Stela of *Ini-iti.f, son of Snt* (BM EA 581)

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senwsert I)

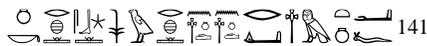
Provenance: Abydos



ink mty n pr nswt rh.f ddt m h3 nb

I was a precise one of the king's palace, one who knows (lit. he knows) that which was said in every office.

He further states:



ink rh(.w) sb3 sw rh ndnd r di(.t) nd.t(w) (m)-.f

I was a knower, who taught himself knowledge, (one who) caused that one takes counsel from him.¹⁴²

4.8. Stela of *Ini-iti.f, son of Snt* (BM EA 572)

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senwsert I)

Provenance: Abydos



mtr¹⁴⁴ rn m rh ht

¹³⁸ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 37 *n-ḥt-n* 'inasmuch as', *r-ḥt* 'greatly'; i.e. a big fault.

¹³⁹ R. O. Faulkner, "The Stela of Rudj'aa", *JEA* 37 (1951), 47-52; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 71, 72; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 84, (3).

¹⁴⁰ *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae &c. in the British Museum*, Part 2 (London, 1911-1912), pl. 23; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 109-111; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 112.

¹⁴¹ *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae &c. in the British Museum* 2, pl. 23; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 109-111.

¹⁴² Cf. Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 114.

¹⁴³ *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae &c. in the British Museum* 2, pl. 22; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 106, 107.

(One) distinguished of name as a knower of things.

4.9. Stela of *Tni-iti.f*, son of *Snt* (BM EA 562)

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senwsert I)

Provenance: Abydos, ANOC 5



*sn*¹⁴⁶ *kn*¹⁴⁷ *r ir.n.i n.i ini n drw rh m ihwt*

(Only) a capable one may surpass (what) I did for myself, (namely) reaching the limits of knowledge of things.

4.10. Stela of *Tni-iti.f* (Louvre C 167 – E 3111)

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senwsert I)

Provenance: Abydos, ANOC 4



*s33 sbk*¹⁴⁹ *m hr-ib wrw*

(One) knowledgeable and wise among the great ones.

4.11. Stela of *Tni-iti.f* (Louvre C 168)

Date: Twelfth Dynasty (Senwsert I)

Provenance: Abydos, ANOC 4



rh mty n irt

A knower of the correct way of acting.



*šs*¹⁵² *m3^c*

(One) truly wise.



¹⁴⁴ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 121.

¹⁴⁵ *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae &c. in the British Museum* 2, pl. 24; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 108, 109.

¹⁴⁶ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 229 “surpass”.

¹⁴⁷ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 279.

¹⁴⁸ Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 33, 34; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 138.

¹⁴⁹ *Wb* IV, 94, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 160; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 144, (x+1).

¹⁵¹ Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 160; Landgráfová, *It is my good name that you should remember*, 144, (x+1).

¹⁵² Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 271.

Conclusion

Due to the records, portraying the impressive ethics of work atmosphere in ancient Egypt in a favorable light is possible. The texts mirror social aspects, enhancing perceived appropriate behaviour. The sources are concerned with commonly formulated energetic performance and enthusiasm (documents 2.8, 3.3, 3.5);¹⁵⁹ aiming at earning respect and esteem. To complement the information deduced from the texts, it was necessary to elicit related characteristics from officials' biographies, which allowed the same message to be conveyed.

The study particularly involves varied ways of expression, and the documentation serves two purposes:

First, it provides indications that devotion to work and completion of tasks were valued social virtues during the Middle and the New Kingdoms. Several examples of the texts studied point at being challenged from within. Interestingly, adaptations to the same idea of work commitment are encountered both on stelae and in tomb scenes.

Second, it proves that a classic ideal worker was actively engaged in work. This should have been connected to aspects of real life. Affirming work commitment was a strategy to confirm hard work regardless of the presence of supervised authority. Examples of statements both from and outside the standardized formulae were recorded, hence the significance of the documentation.

The study of Middle and New Kingdom written sources reveals a strong commitment to work ethics. Far from being imposed, devotion to work is exemplified by the attitudes of workmen as in document (3.2); where the brewer retorts that the lad asking for food has been delaying her work.¹⁶⁰ Confirming perfect work performance was commonly encountered. Workers seem to have derived their inspiration for commitment from the necessity of completion of one's responsibilities on time; a primary motivational core work value.

Besides, the texts entail an amusing spirit; reflecting pleasant work ambiances. The duties do not seem to be imposed; they rather reflect how the typical model was regarded. Determination to accomplish the needed tasks on time is consistently explicitly expressed.

The texts concern all categories of superiors, subordinates, upper level officials as well as workers. The study therefore allows a look both on the working classes, and those belonging to the leisure class. The texts hence allow to identify ideals and personality characteristics of workers in all levels. Being knowledgeable and mastering their work were considered achievements. Accomplishing the highest level

¹⁵⁹ 'Working with the hearts' as in pBritish Museum 10375 : Černy, *Late Ramesside Letters*, 45, r. 14, 'being heartedly involved in work' in the tomb-chapel of *df3(.i) h5py* in Assiut: Junker, *Zu einigen Reden und Rufen auf Grabbildern des Alten Reiches*, 15, 'willingness to do more work than the required' as in the tomb of *P3 hry* at El-Kab: Tylor, *Paheri*, pl. III.

¹⁶⁰ Tomb-chapel of *Snt* at Thebes : Davies, *The Tomb of Antefoker*, 15, pl. XI.

of success and possessing unique skills were linked to self definition. In the Egyptian culture's rules of conduct, work commitment composes an eternal ideal image.

The textual material is exceptional in the Middle and the New Kingdoms outside the medium of the stela. Although not frequently attested, examples related to work commitment in tomb scenes provide insight into real work ambiance. Their intents while uttering these phrases should have been different from recording them on stelae. Therefore, they should be differentiated from self-laudatory text genres.

The studied contexts echo work atmosphere where the statements would not be expressed as mere formulaic. The documentation highlights extremely motivated workers, keen to perform their duties. Workers' attitudes reflect that they would have not been obliged to perform work. Complementary evidence from the tombs record enthusiasm while working as in documents (3.4) and (3.5).

The study revealed how they phrased their own conversations differently while maintaining and propagating their sense of dedication to duty. One of the substantial characteristics of such texts is that they are far from being stereotyped. The phraseology is richly varied; the formulation of utterances in tomb scenes, in letters as well as in the documents recorded on ostraca is not standardized, nor is it uniformly stated. Only on stelae do we encounter similarities of style. Their phraseology includes variations, but also parallels and common phrases.

The study allows to explore statements of devotion to work in the Middle and New Kingdom texts. Conversely, The New Kingdom letter (3.8) recorded on Ostrakon DeM 328 reports *tb* for not having been reliable in assisting *P3 b3ki*.¹⁶¹ The study of the workmen community at Deir el-Medineh likewise sheds light on cases of punishment due to negligence of duties. Other tomb journals record cases of absence from work due to illness. Ostrakon DeM 5634, bears a list of forty names where the word *mr* 'ill' was written in red, corresponding to the reason for absences.¹⁶² Other examples were recorded as well on Ostrakon CGC 25785, r 1-2, and some reasons for work absences were stated as *bw šm r p3 b3kw* 'did not go to work', and *bw rh.f b3k* 'he was not able to work'.¹⁶³

Common socially and individually recognized desirable traits included the claim of surpassing others in work and knowledge in auto/biographies, specifically those appearing on stelae. Likewise, the textual material hints at denial of mismanagement (4.2) and capability of taking counsel in order not to cause any bad thing to occur (4.1). Their deeds even included mastering their skills (4.14), and surpassing others (4.4).¹⁶⁴ Different *topoi* were therefore intertwined; emphasizing their knowledge and eloquence skills, therefore being respectful and excellent in their crafts.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ McDowell, *Village life in ancient Egypt*, 29.

¹⁶² Jac. Janssen, "Absence from Work by the Necropolis Workmen of Thebes", 128, 129. The ostrakon is dated to year forty of Ramesses II.

¹⁶³ Davies, *Genealogies and Personality Characteristics*, 414.

¹⁶⁴ Clère and Vandier, *Textes de la première période intermédiaire et de la XIème dynastie*, § 15, 17; 23; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁵ Kaplony, "Die Handwerker als Kulturträger Altägyptens", 115.

The documentation provides insight into work values in Middle and New Kingdom Egypt. The study allows to identify and examine registers of qualifications that would complement relevant documents belonging to the administrative corpus concerning workers, artisans, overseers, staff members and administrators.

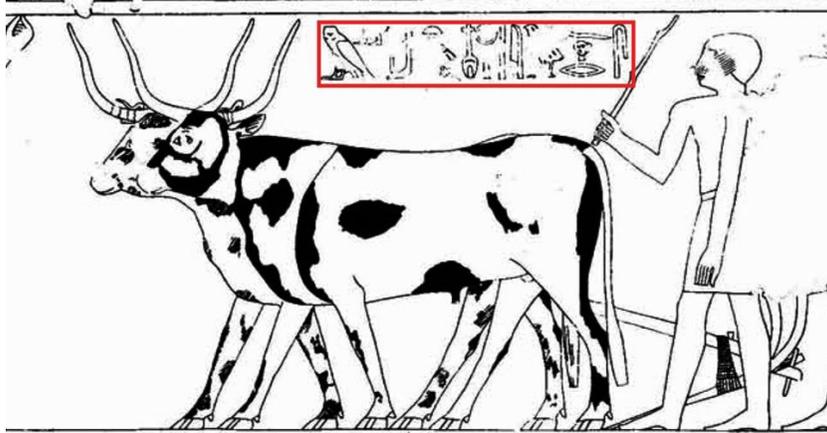


Fig.1. Tomb of *Snbi* (B nr. 1), Meir, north wall, centre, detail. Twelfth Dynasty.

After A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir. Volume I. The Tomb-Chapel of Ukh-Hotep's son Senbi*, ASEg 22 (London, 1914), pl. III.

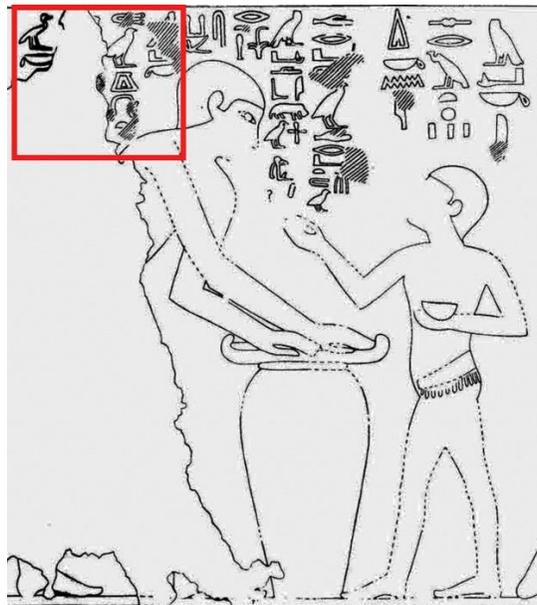


Fig.2. Tomb-chapel of *Snt* (TT 60), Thebes, north wall, detail. Twelfth Dynasty.

After N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Antefoqer, Vizier of Sesostris I, and of His Wife Sennet*, TTS II (London, 1920), pl. XI.

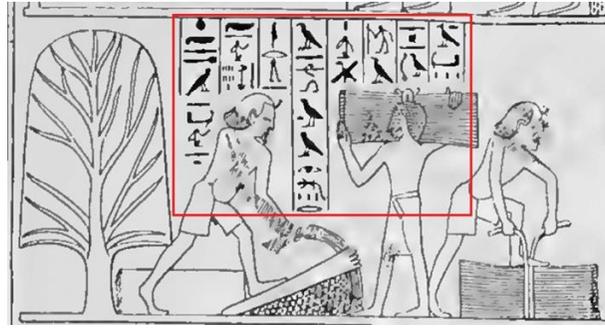


Fig. 3. Tomb of P3 hry, El-Kab, west wall, south end, detail. Eighteenth Dynasty.

After J. J. Tylor, F. L. Griffith, *Ahnas el Medineh (Heracleopolis Magna): with Chapters on Mendes, the Nome of Thot, and Leontopolis / The Tomb of Paheri at El Kab*, MEEF 11 (London, 1894), pl. III.



Fig.4. Tomb of P3 hry, El-Kab, west wall, south end, detail. Eighteenth Dynasty.

After Tylor, Paheri, pl. III.

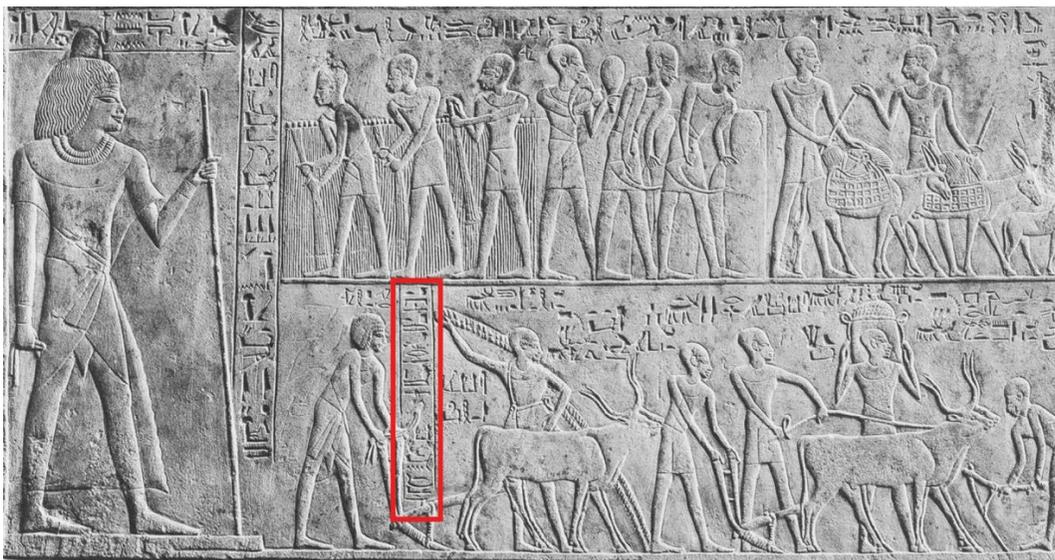


Fig.5. Tomb of Mry mry, Memphis, detail. Nineteenth Dynasty.

After P. A. Boeser, *Beschreibung der Ägyptischen Sammlung des Niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden IV, Die Denkmäler des Neuen Reiches, Erster Abteilung, Gräber* (Leiden, 1911), Taf. XVIII.

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التفاني في العمل في نصوص الدولتين الوسطى والحديثة

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المخلص

تم التأكيد على التفاني في سياق مضمون العمل والصفات الإيجابية في نصوص الدولتين الوسطى والحديثة. وتشير النصوص إلى خصائل تم اعتبارها من سمات السلوك الاجتماعي المثالي في مجال العمل. وتشكل النصوص نموذجاً للالتزام الموظفين والإداريين والعمال، بشكل يسمح بفهم قيمة العمل والأخلاقيات المرتبطة به خلال الدولتين الوسطى والحديثة. والموضوع يسلط الضوء على عوامل أخرى ذات صلة مثل زملاء العمل ومكان العمل واكتساب المهارات وظروف العمل. وتعد النصوص التي تتناول ذكر التفاني في العمل نادرة من الدولتين الوسطى والحديثة. وعلى الرغم من ذلك فلا بد أن الأحاديث المتبادلة في مناظر المقابر في الورش والحقول كانت مستوحاة من الحياة الحقيقية. ومن ثم فإن البحث يتناول بالدراسة والتفسير مظاهر تتعلق بموضوع العمل في مصر القديمة، وكذلك مصادر معلومات ذات صلة من الدولتين الوسطى والحديثة. وقد كان التأكيد على التفاني في العمل وسيلة لتأكيد جدية العمل والإصرار على التحدي بغض النظر عن سلطة الإشراف. وقد تم تسجيل نصوص تنتمي إلى نوعية الصيغ التقليدية وأخرى من خارجها؛ ومن هنا تبدو أهمية النصوص التي تمت دراستها.

معلومات المقالة

الكلمات المفتاحية

العمل؛ التفاني؛
النظام؛ العمال؛
السمات المميزة.

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