

## **Hieratic Inscriptions from the Tomb of Maya at Saqqāra: A Preliminary Survey**

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In the spring of 1986 the joint expedition of the Egypt Exploration Society and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden re-discovered, perhaps not unexpectedly, but certainly in an unexpected way, the long lost tomb of Maya, the Overseer of the Treasury under Tut'ankhamun.<sup>1</sup> The initial discovery of the tomb resulted from the investigation of a robbers' breakthrough in a subsidiary shaft in the adjacent tomb of Ra'mose. This rather unorthodox way of discovering a tomb meant that excavation of the very parts we had seen first, the subterranean chambers of the tomb, had to be postponed until the clearance of the superstructure had been completed. In 1988 this moment was finally reached, and the burial complex of Maya was re-entered through its proper access, the main shaft of the tomb. Two years earlier it had already been established that the underground complex was on two levels, and it now became clear that only the first (upper) level had been reused in antiquity. The second (lower) level, at a depth of nearly 22 m below the pavement of the superstructure, had been thoroughly robbed, perhaps even more than once, but no intrusive material whatsoever of any later date was found, and it is therefore virtually certain that all of the finds made in this part of the tomb belonged to the original funerary equipment of Maya and Meryt, or of the members of their family who were also buried in the tomb.

Besides the many interesting, albeit mostly fragmentary, objects discovered among the debris, there was also a truly astonishing amount of pottery sherds scattered throughout the rooms and corridors of the burial complex, and a fair number of these were inscribed in hieratic. Almost all of

<sup>1</sup> See the preliminary reports by G. T. Martin *et al.* in *JEA* 73 (1987), 6-8; 74 (1988), 1-14; 77 (1991, forthcoming).

the hieratic docket or jar labels have had to be assembled from several small fragments which were often found in different parts of the burial complex. Some of them have now been incorporated into an even larger number of uninscribed sherds to form more or less complete pots, but this painstaking process, carried out by David and Barbara Aston, is still going on. Residues of the original contents of the vessels still remain on the interior of some of the sherds and it is very much hoped that these can be analyzed in the near future. In the following paragraphs the various categories of jar labels will be briefly reviewed and some preliminary conclusions will be presented as well as some problems which still need to be solved.

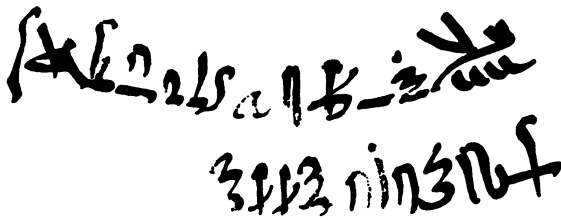


Fig. 1

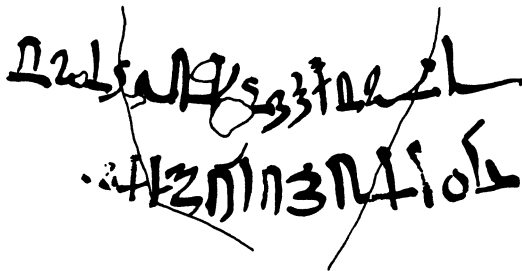




Fig. 2

By far the largest group consists of no less than 30 docketts, all of which are inscribed on the shoulders of similar medium-sized jars with two handles and a tall neck. This group can itself be divided into three categories according to the commodity mentioned in the text. These commodities are "honey" (*bit*; fig. 1), "fresh sesame oil" (*nḥḥ wjḡ*), and "sweet moringa oil" (*bsq ndm*; fig. 2). The full text of such a label reads: "Sweet moringa oil for the funeral procession of the Osiris, the Royal Scribe and Overseer of the Treasury, Maya". Each of the three commodities is represented by exactly 10 labels, and it is very likely that this number represents the original total of each category. Apart from a few very minor scribal errors, the spelling and wording of the labels is exactly the same within each of the three categories, but it varies slightly between the categories as a whole. Thus all ten of the honey docketts write the word "the Osiris" as  and this word occurs at the end of the first line of the text. The moringa oil docketts, on the other hand, all write this word at the beginning of the second line and spell it as , whereas the sesame oil labels omit it altogether. Similar variations occur in the writing of the name Maya, which shows the seated man-determinative written *underneath* the final *j* of the name in each of the ten honey docketts, but *following* it in the moringa and sesame oil labels. These facts, as well as the actual shape of certain individual signs, which again is consistent within each of the three categories, prove that a different scribe was responsible for each of the three commodities mentioned in the labels. This in turn may mean that each commodity was administered by a different department of the Treasury

The second group to be considered briefly consists of four labels mentioning various kinds of *mrht*-oil. Three of these occur on pottery jars, while the remaining one is inscribed on a large and heavy alabaster pot. The exact meaning of the word *mrht* is still unknown; not only does it appear to denote both animal fat and vegetable oil, but the application of *mrht* varied greatly too.<sup>2</sup> Janssen has suggested that in the price texts from Deir el-

<sup>2</sup> H. von Deines & H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Drogennamen* (Berlin, 1959), 250-279

Medinah it often means castor oil, but he admits that this meaning does not suit many instances in the medical texts.<sup>3</sup> The Maya docket mentions three varieties. The first of these is *mrht hsq(t)*, literally "cut off *mrht*" (fig. 3). This may be compared to *mrht hsq(t) n(t) ht-ntr* which occurs twice in the Embalming Ritual<sup>4</sup> and for which Goyon has suggested "oil cut off, i.e. set aside or levied from the divine property", oil which had been ritually



Fig. 3

prepared in the temple workshop.<sup>5</sup> In view of Maya's high position and of his involvement in the restoration of the temples after the abandonment of Amarna this may well be a possibility. In Maya's case this type of *mrht* will hardly have been used for his mummification, however, for it is well known that embalming materials were not included in the funerary equipment, but buried separately outside the premises of the tomb. A second variety is *mrht rsyt*, "southern *mrht*", for which I have been unable to find a parallel so far. The third type occurs twice, on the alabaster pot as well as on a pottery jar, it reads *mrht imy-st-r*, "*mrht* of the heart". The only parallels known to me are of Late Period date. One of these was found in the tomb of Nefersekeru at Thebes,<sup>6</sup> here the

<sup>3</sup> Jac. J. Janssen, *Commodity Prices from the Ramessid Period* (Leiden, 1975), 333-336.

<sup>4</sup> S. Sauneron, *Rituel de l'Embaumement, Pap. Boulaq III, Pap. Louvre 5.158* (Cairo, 1952), 30, 4; 31, 7.

<sup>5</sup> J.-C. Goyon, *Rituels funéraires de l'ancienne Égypte* (Paris, 1972), 74 n.1 ("Huile prélevée sur la dotation divine", litt. "huile retranchée des biens divins").

<sup>6</sup> H.-J. Thissen, in E. Feucht, *Das Grab des Nefersecheru (TT 296)* (Mainz, 1985), 139-140. See also J. Quaegebeur, in: E. Graefe, *Das Grab des Ibi, Obervermögenverwalters der Gottesgemahlin des Amun (Thebanisches Grab Nr. 36)* (Bruxelles, 1990), 64, No.52

word *imy-st-ꞣ* is followed by *m stjyt*, perhaps "in the chest". The Nefersekeru docket has been discussed by Heinz-Joseph Thissen, who suggests that the "heart" (*imy-st-ꞣ*, itself a word so far attested in Ptolemaic texts only) mentioned in the label is the heart of an animal rather than that of a human being. This is not impossible, but it is equally possible that we should understand not "fat extracted from the heart (of an animal)", but rather "oil to be applied to the heart, i.e. the chest (of a human being)". Fairman remarked that in Ptolemaic texts the word *imy-st-ꞣ* "describes the human heart in general and is also applied to the heart as the seat of emotions and as the organ of justice".<sup>7</sup> A search for further parallels may help to solve some of these problems.

The next two groups of jar labels concern wine and water. Wine and other alcoholic beverages are notable for their almost complete absence. This is particularly regrettable since a collection of wine labels would almost certainly have provided us with year dates. Only very small fragments have survived; of these one or possibly two read *irp*, "wine"; a further one gives the determinative of either *irp* or *šdh*, followed by *nfr nfr*, "very good quality [wine / *šdh*]". One complete example (fig. 4) simply reads *šdh ndm* "sweet *šdh*", another *irp ndm* "sweet wine"; neither provide any indication of date or provenance. These fragments suffice to show that Maya

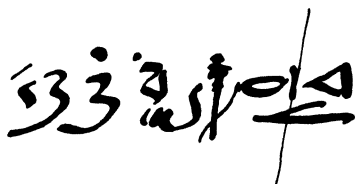


Fig. 4

was certainly not a teetotaler. In fact the almost total absence of fragments of wine amphorae, despite the fact that every sherd from the

<sup>7</sup> H. W. Fairman, *ZAS* 91 (1964), 4-5.

underground complex was carefully collected, may well give us a precious clue as to the date of the robbery of Maya's tomb. When the tomb was robbed viscous commodities like honey and various oils, which were stored in relatively small containers, were probably decanted into leather sacks before being hauled up to the surface, both to speed up their removal and to reduce the risk of breaking the jars against the walls of the shafts; their original containers were clearly smashed *in situ*. For obvious reasons this method could not be applied to wine, and the intact amphorae had to be taken up to the surface. In fact, the *irp ndm* label mentioned above was reconstructed from two fragments found above ground, in the inner courtyard of the tomb. Perhaps the contents of one or two jars were tested first, which would explain the tiny fragments found downstairs. If this reconstruction is correct, it means that Maya's wine was still potable when the tomb was robbed. Wine does not survive very long in porous pottery jars, and for this reason it is doubted whether, for example, the oldest wine label in the tomb of Tut'ankhamun, which dates to Year 31, presumably of Amenhotep III, really represents the date of the wine inside the amphora, or whether this particular amphora was reused.<sup>8</sup> At the very most, such a period of some thirty years would represent the limit of the wine's life, and this would mean that the tomb of Maya was robbed not later than thirty years after his death, and probably much earlier.

Perhaps the most interesting group of labels is the one mentioning water. Similar water docketts were discovered by our expedition during the excavation of the tomb of Tia. A deposit of broken funerary material, found at the end of a blind alley between the tombs of Tia and Horemheb, and possibly cleared out of the Ramesside burial chambers in Shaft i of Horemheb, contained 14 large amphorae, two of which were inscribed with hieratic labels. These will soon be published;<sup>9</sup> they read "Water of the flood (*Jgb*) brought from Patju(f)" and "Water of the Xoite nome brought

<sup>8</sup> L. H. Lesko, *King Tut's Wine Cellar* (Berkeley, 1977), 23.

<sup>9</sup> G. T. Martin *et al.*, *The Tomb of Tia and Tia. A Royal Monument of the Ramesside Period in the Memphite Necropolis* (in the press).

from the Xoite nome, from the Western River"<sup>10</sup> In both cases the water has been brought from localities in the Delta. The finding of several more examples of this type of docket in the burial chamber prove that these water jars were stored intact with the rest of the funerary equipment, and not ritually smashed during the actual funeral proceedings, as has also been suggested.<sup>11</sup> Six examples have so far been identified among the sherds from Maya's tomb, but it is still possible that more fragments will be identified, for these particular dockets are extremely faint and of some of them only ghost traces remain. Only three of the labels are complete and can

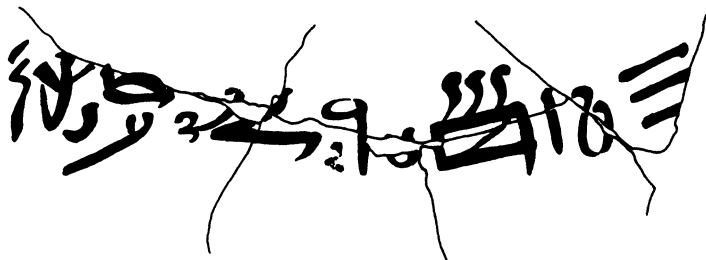


Fig. 5

be read with certainty; these mention "Water of the marshland (*šš*) of Patjuf" (fig. 5), "Water of *Hwt-ihyt*",<sup>12</sup> and "Water of *Šn-qbh*".<sup>13</sup> All three (and probably all six) places are in the Delta, the southernmost being *Šn-qbh*, just north of Heliopolis. As far as can be judged at present, the dockets are all in a different hand, and the actual size of these water jars also varies. This further strengthens our conviction that they really were brought from various far-off places in the Delta to the Memphite necropolis. This itself testifies to the fact that great importance was attached to this sacred water. Pascal Vernus has suggested that it was brought from places

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. J. Raven, *GM* 75 (1984), 27-30

<sup>11</sup> By J. Malek, *apud* Vernus (see n. 14 below), 324.

<sup>12</sup> *GDG* IV, 51.

<sup>13</sup> *GDG* V, 140 (& 128); W. Spiegelberg, *ZAS* 64 (1929), 81

where the Nile went through certain critical, liminary phases, for example from places where the river divided itself into various branches, or where it flowed into lakes or swamps.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Xoïs in particular, this sacred water was then connected with the efflux (*rdw*) of the body of Osiris, which was equated with the waters of the Nile and worshipped in Xoïs in the 6th Lower Egyptian nome. The water in the jars must have played a significant role in the regeneration of the deceased, but how was it used? Was it used for purification or was it to be drunk? Perhaps there is a link with certain cultic vessels containing life-giving water of the inundation and which may or may not be connected with the later Osiris-Canopus vessels. A ritual vessel resembling a canopic jar from the tomb of the 12th Dynasty princess Sithathōriunet in Lahun bears an inscription saying that the water it contained was "this cool water which is in the earth", which "begets everything" and "from which everything comes forth upon which you live".<sup>15</sup> If the water in the Saqqâra jars was meant to be drunk, it could perhaps be connected with a group of spells in the Book of the Dead (Ch. 58-63) which are concerned with "drinking water in the necropolis": the deceased "has come forth from the flood (*sgb*), the overflow (*bsj*) has been given to him" and through this he "has access to the Inundation (*H'py*)" (BD Nav. 61, 1-2). On the other hand, these spells are related to certain passages in the Pyramid Texts, which deal with the resurrection of the deceased King: "Your water belongs to you, your overflow (*bsj*) belongs to you, your efflux (*rdw*) belongs to you which issued from Osiris".<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the sacred water was meant to replace and restore the bodily fluids drained out of the body during mummification.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, further research will be needed to answer the

<sup>14</sup> P. Vernus, "L'eau sainte de Xoïs", *DE Special Volume 1* (1989), 323-335.

<sup>15</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, G. Brunton, M. A. Murray, *Lahun II* (London, 1920), 16, 42, Pls. 25: 7, 26. Cf. K. Martin, *LA* III, 315-316, n. 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Pyr.* 2007a-b; cf. *Pyr.* 1360a-b.

<sup>17</sup> See for this idea W. Westendorf, in U. Verhoeven & E. Graefe (ed.), *Religion und Philosophie im Alten Ägypten* [Fs Derchain] (Louvain, 1991), 353. The various *mrht* oils may have served a similar purpose.



many questions posed by this highly interesting group of docket.

Finally, a few words may be devoted to two single jar labels. The first of these, incompletely preserved, mentions "fresh fat ( *'d w3d* ) ... made in the stock-yard ( *shyt* ) ..." and is dated to a regnal year 9, surely of Horemheb. As I have already pointed out elsewhere,<sup>18</sup> this docket almost certainly provides us with the date of Maya's death. The other label is complete and the

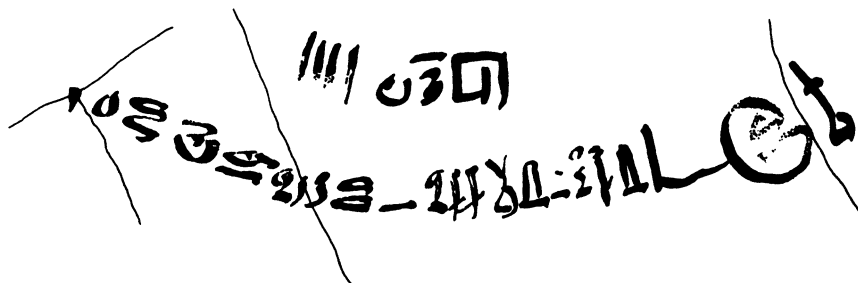


Fig. 6

jar on which it was inscribed has been reassembled; it is of the same type as the honey and oil jars, but smaller. The label reads (fig. 6) "Best quality moringa oil with gum and mandragora, dedicated by Nebrē", above this line the quantity is added: "4 hin". The ingredients of this costly ointment with its mildly intoxicating and aphrodisiac qualities<sup>19</sup> are mentioned in love poetry and in various "make merry" texts in tombs and on funerary objects,<sup>20</sup> and it too probably served the regeneration of the deceased. Janssen noted that gum was quite expensive,<sup>21</sup> and when the High Priest of Amun Amenhotep was awarded the gold of honour in Year 10 of Ramesses IX, he received besides gold and silver two hin of "sweet moringa oil with gum" from the Treasury.<sup>22</sup> Maya's jar contained no less than double this quantity.

<sup>18</sup> *JEA* 74 (1988), 14 and, in more detail, *OMRO* 70 (1990), 25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. Germer, *Flora des pharaonischen Ägypten* (Mainz, 1985), 169-171.

<sup>20</sup> See the *Belegstellen* to *Wb.* V 39, 11 and 40, 1; M. Lichtheim, *JNES* 4 (19), 195, Pl. 7, col. 6-7; E. Pusch, *Das Senet-Brettspiel im alten Ägypten* I (München, 1979), 211-212, Pl. 50, etc.

<sup>21</sup> Janssen, *op. cit.*, 446-447.

A nice personal touch is added by the mention of the name of the donor. Although no title is given, it is very likely that this Nebrēf is to be identified with one of Maya's subordinates, the "Scribe of the Treasury of the Lord of the Two Lands, Nebrēf", who is depicted in one of the reliefs in the inner courtyard of the tomb.<sup>23</sup> Thus Nebrēf contributed in his own way to the re-birth of his master, just as Maya himself had contributed to that of his lord, Tut'ankhamun.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> K. RI VI, 456, 10ff., G. Lefebvre, *Inscriptions concernant les grands prêtres d'Amon, Romé-Roy et Amanhotep* (Paris, 1929), 64-68, Pl. 2.

<sup>23</sup> L. D III, 241b = Graefe, *MDAIK* 31 (1975), 196 fig. 4.

<sup>24</sup> This article is an emended version of a paper presented at the Sixth International Congress of Egyptology, held in Turin, 1-8 September, 1991. The facsimile drawings are my own; they are reproduced here with kind permission of the Egypt Exploration Society, London, and of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden. For various useful comments I am indebted to E. Graefe, H. Güksch and T. G. H. James.