# ‘Hail Thee, Festival Day’

## Interaction of Primary and Secondary Epigraphy in the Pyramid Temple of Senwosret III

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### Dedication

Egyptian graffiti and dipinti, secondary epigraphy for short, are a fascinating body of ancient texts and images; they may reveal formal training of an Egyptian intellectual embodied in elegant calligraphy, as well as impromptu responses to a place and a moment in time. Ursula Verhoeven has done a lion’s share of work to place these seemingly unprepossessing traces and messages of the Egyptian world firmly on the map of the Egyptological scholarship. I hope that this offering will contribute to her own ‘beautiful day’.

## Introduction

The pyramid precinct of Senwosret III in the north-eastern part of the Dahshur necropolis had a long history including centuries of post-Middle Kingdom use and re-use.[1] Details of the process of use of the temple spaces, and ultimately the reuse of the material, of the precinct, are emerging progressively. The long life of the pyramid complex is reflected both in material and in written culture, from burials to graffiti, from pottery and tools left on site to faience beads. Individual finds of post-Middle Kingdom date, particularly graffiti, may provoke more questions than they may offer answers to, yet they may be convincingly said to represent both an ongoing process of cultural memory, and its changes. They also appear to show a granularity of responses to the monument: each space of the pyramid precinct may have been experienced on its own, and then as a part of the large complex,[2]

[1] An outline of the long history of the pyramid was provided by Arnold 2002, 26 for general observations of removal of superstructures, and for subterranean apartments 42–43, and passim. On Ramesside removal dockets see Navratilova 2015a.

[2] Navratilova, forthcoming.

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or as an element within the necropolis landscape. The motivations behind secondary epigraphy might have differed vastly.

Even the very interior of the pyramid could have become an adapted, or perhaps even contested, space, as the open-ended debate on a special group of dipinti in the subterranean chambers of Senwosret III indicates.[3] There were at least two ethnic groups characterised visually in these dipinti from the Second Intermediate Period, Egyptians and people of Asiatic origin, and the dipinti also refer to a falcon deity, possibly Sokar. Reference to Sokar would be very pertinent in a royal funerary setting. At least some of the visitors were, as their appearance seems to indicate, the *Aamu,* 'Asiatics', and they might have 'purposefully visited the place on a kind of pilgrimage or had a religious experience' when they were there for another purpose.[4] It would be an early example of secondary epigraphy reflecting religious experience of different communities in shared sacred spaces in Egypt.[5]

The quantity of graffiti and other post-Middle Kingdom finds combined with the obvious complexity of primary decoration of the superstructures in the precinct have attracted attention to the South Temple, the Pyramid Temple, and the North Chapel, both in early and in recent research.[6] It may be claimed that the quantity of secondary finds suggests an intense ancient reception of the primary decoration and architectural features.

This contribution presents a unique secondary epigraphy feature from the Pyramid Temple: a New Kingdom dipinto probably referring to *hrw nfr*, or 'beautiful day.' Its dating is approximate and based both on a palaeography assessment, and on the context. Evaluating the palaeography of such a short text is a fragile dating method, yet not unimportant when embedded in a more extensive analysis of the location and its archaeological context.

The text written in red ink is located within a Middle Kingdom offering scene. The offering scene with *hrw nfr* had certainly belonged to the offering chamber, a central element in the structure of the Pyramid Temple spaces. Despite its brevity—the dipinto consists only of two signs, and as a statement it conveys only two words—it is laden with meaning; both the words and their location *vis-à-vis* primary epigraphy are of decisive importance. It is definitely not the first use of the topic of *hrw nfr* in a *Festschrift*, but to my knowledge the first one to analyse this expression in the context of secondary epigraphy. The multiple meanings of *nfr* or *nfr.w* in secondary epigraphy were, however, investigated in some detail.[7]

[3] This group of dipinti, considered very puzzling, inhabits the subterranean interior of the pyramid: de Morgan 1903, 92–97; Arnold 2002, 42–42.

[4] Do. Arnold 2010, 200–206.

[5] Later examples of sites where secondary epigraphy attests to transregional-transnational religious experience in a shared sacred space include (but are not limited to) Abydos, Philae and Elephantine: Rutherford 2003, Kornfeld 1978; overview of Philae's epigraphic corpus Kockelmann 2020, for Elephantine see Maehler 1992, Navratilova and Rutherford 2020.

[6] The dipinti were first noted by Perring and Vyse, further texts were recorded by de Morgan 1895, 78–80. A review of new finds from the 1990s to 2010s is found in Navratilova et al. 2013.

[7] Recently also by Petrova 2020, *nfr.w* as private apartments of the king (funeral and otherwise); a dipinto in the tomb of Ramesses III might have been a working note to mark where the innermost part of the tomb began.

## Archaeology and epigraphy in the Pyramid Temple

The Pyramid Temple was positioned on the eastern side of the pyramid of Senwosret III, in a location that became traditional since the scheme of pyramid complexes had settled into a routine developed in the Old Kingdom pyramid precincts.[8] The pyramid temples, also known as mortuary/memorial/funerary temples, located on the eastern side of their pyramids often were the entry and exit points where the causeway joined the main part of the precinct. The temple buildings also joined the pyramid. In the case of Senwosret III, the causeway joined the front of the later South Temple, rather than the Pyramid Temple.[9]

Of Senwosret III's Pyramid Temple superstructure, only its mud-brick sub-foundations and numerous limestone relief and architectural fragments survive,[10] as well as a few statue fragments, showing a remarkable extent of the temple decoration programme as well as its exquisite craftmanship and artistic value.[11] The plan of the Pyramid Temple can be reconstructed tentatively as containing approximately four rooms.[12] The architecture of the Pyramid Temple featured several distinct functional as well as decorative elements, such as green and yellow painted complex doorways, and a dado. A large number of preserved fragments with later secondary inscriptions comes from these architectural elements.

The post-Middle Kingdom history of the Pyramid Temple of Senwosret III appears to have been eventful, but its archaeological history in more recent times has been more complicated. For a long time, the explorers did not focus on the area where the Pyramid Temple once stood. Perring's research focused at the northern side of the pyramid, not its eastern side, where the Pyramid Temple is located. In the 1830s, Perring identified some—presumably intrusive—hieratic texts alongside fragments of original relief decoration close to the pyramid—'blocks containing hieratic inscriptions, and hieroglyphics sculptured in relief',[13] but his report does not permit to say whether the hieratic texts in question were control notes of some description, or visitors' texts written over the original relief decoration. His recorded copy of a hieratic text looks like a Ramesside demolition docket.[14] Perring's impression also was that many blocks in the area were ready for removal. Overall, his observations must have been concerned with the area of the North Chapel, not the Pyramid Temple.

Further evidence of a considerable re-use of stone was identified by de Morgan,[15] although his knowledge of the Pyramid Temple was again limited.[16] Specifically, several stones re-worked into column pieces[17] can be regarded as relatively prominent examples of later activity, alongside hieratic inscriptions, but the columns must have come from the

[8] Structure of standard pyramid complex developed during the Old Kingdom was outlined by Verner 2020, 55–56, major changes occasioned by more than one factor, pp. 216–217.
[9] Arnold 2002, 91–96.
[10] Arnold 2002, 46–54.
[11] Oppenheim 2008.
[12] See below, according to Oppenheim 2008; earlier hypotheses Arnold 2002, 48–49.
[13] Vyse 1840, Appendix, vol. 3, 59.
[14] See Navratilova 2015a.
[15] de Morgan 1895, 77–78, vol. 2, 92; see also Arnold 2002, 46.
[16] Oppenheim 2008, 6–7.
[17] de Morgan 1895, 78–80, the inscribed fragments were transported to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

South Temple. Eventually, de Morgan later identified several hieratic dipinti in the area that we now understand to have been the Pyramid Temple.[18] The dipinti are datable to the New Kingdom, and at least some might have been also 18th dynasty, so not related to the demolition.[19]

More secondary inscriptions in the Pyramid Temple have been brought to light by the Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition to Dahshur since the renewal of excavations in 1990. These also reveal two categories of secondary hieratic texts (i.e., texts not related to the building of the Pyramid Temple) and some figural graffiti and dipinti. The same categories were also found in other parts of the precinct. All can be dated to the New Kingdom.

The first category of texts and figures includes graffiti and dipinti from probably the 18th dynasty, and mostly referring to visits with a combined devotional, historical, and possibly inspection interest. Their dating presents some problematic issues, specifically for texts which are preserved as fragments only. They appear to offer an ancient reflection on the importance of the Pyramid Temple. Although any art-historical evaluation is obviously a modern reflection on Egyptian art, it is difficult to assume that the Egyptian observer would be completely unaffected by the temple spaces with walls covered by intensely coloured and adroitly executed signs and figures. Especially as they carried a strong cultural message that could be read or at least gleaned by the visitors, their perception depending also on their status. That the literate visitors made a clear identification of the space as a temple, *ḥw.t nṯr*, is evident from their hieratic texts. The impact of the ancient location as a realm of memory and sacred space was seen across very different spaces—from narrow and simple North and South Chapels of Djoser to the richly decorated chapels and temples of Senwosret III. Some nuance of impressions was perhaps reflected in the frequently repeated statement that some temples were found 'more beautiful than any other temple.' This accolade was frequently attributed to the buildings of Senwosret III.[20]

The second category of secondary epigraphy in the Pyramid Temple consists of (most likely Ramesside, as they include the name of Ramesses II) New Kingdom control notes related to the reworking and removal of stone blocks.[21] Other evidence for an intense and at least to some extent planned demolition process is also appearing. For example, the shape of relief fragments is indicative of the destruction process. 'Most have fairly flat backs, an indication that the decorated surfaces were systematically hacked off, either when the fine limestone was transformed into other objects or in order to disguise the origin of the stone when it was delivered to its new owners.'[22] As a result, a part of the primary decoration of the Pyramid Temple was found in the shape of 12 000 fragments of varied size,[23] approximately fifty of which carry secondary epigraphy features.

The state of preservation of secondary New Kingdom texts and figural features in the Pyramid Temple, inasmuch they survived on the fragmented surfaces, is rather varied. The signs and figures are often still visible quite clearly among the primary decoration, or

[18] Note the map in de Morgan 1895.
[19] Dating of dipinti discussed in Navratilova, Allen, and Arnold 2013.
[20] Navratilova, Allen, and Arnold 2013.
[21] Navratilova 2015a.
[22] Oppenheim 2008, 10.
[23] Oppenheim 2008, 11.

show on a layer of original paint. The original paint indicates architectural features such as the dado and door thicknesses. The relief carving identifies what part of the decorative program the piece belonged to—if enough of the relief is preserved to identify the scene. However, many fragments are minute and what is in some cases visible is less than a complete sign per fragment, complicating its interpretation. Statistically, this is still interesting evidence of graffiti activity. There are also larger fragments of architectural elements, which often carry more than one hieratic text. Two architectural features have been identified as being attractive for secondary epigraphy—parts of a doorway, most often a door thickness, and parts of the dado. Eventually, the texts termed as New Kingdom (or more specifically Ramesside) delivery notes appear on chiselled surfaces of blocks mostly devoid of any traces of a Middle Kingdom decoration, but they were added also directly onto the surface of the primary relief decoration.[24]

Concerning their archaeological context, the secondary epigraphy features have been found on fragments assigned to the Pyramid Temple and coming from a large area in front of the eastern slope of the pyramid. Numerous fragments were found outside the immediate area of Pyramid Temple sub-foundations, which is a common occurrence for all buildings of the pyramid complex of Senwosret III at Dahshur—fragments were spread on and around the space the buildings had originally occupied. Fragments of Pyramid Temple decoration were also found above the foundation of the stone inner enclosure wall.

## Fragment 96.184

The relief block fragment 96.184, executed in raised relief with polychromy and showing offerings, was found during the 1996 excavation season of The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition at Dahshur. It was located in the Pyramid Temple area in the excavation square T/30ab, east of the temple's sub-foundations and of the stone inner enclosure wall, and between this wall and the external enclosure wall (fig. 1). This is evidently its secondary location as it fits into the decoration scheme of the Pyramid Temple proper; the enclosure walls did not have corresponding relief decoration.

As noted above, it is quite common to find relief fragments dispersed in a somewhat larger radius than the sub-foundations of the building they had originally belonged to. Despite the distance some of the fragments must have travelled, we can still retrace where most of them had originally belonged. In general, it is assumed that a fragment belongs to the structure where it was found, though some 'causeway' fragments probably came from elsewhere. Similarly on the north side of the pyramid there is some mixture of Queens' and North Chapel fragments. Since these chapels are single rooms, the fragments are easier to place. The Pyramid Temple and the South Temple had many decorated spaces.

Adela Oppenheim's tentative reconstruction of the structure and decorative scheme of the temple suggests that its plan might have looked as follows: an entrance was from the south, leading to an entrance chamber. From this space, two doorways led to i. a possible statue chamber (to the west), and ii. to the square antechamber (to the east). The modern

[24] An illustrative example is reg. no. 92.54, from the excavation square N-O/13, season 1992.

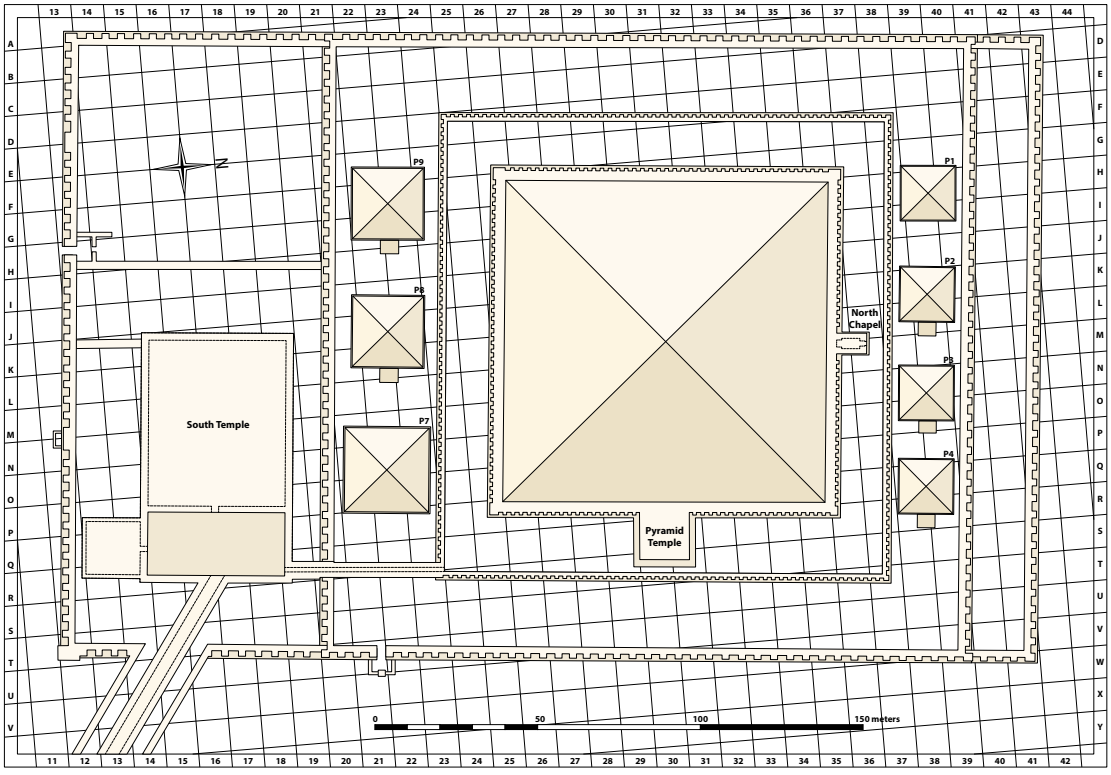



Fig. 1 Pyramid precinct plan with excavation squares (drawing Sara Chen, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

designation 'antechamber' points to its role as an 'anteroom' for the culminating space of the temple: the offering chamber, oriented east-west. However, it appears that the square antechambers were in fact important sacred spaces in their own right: the antechamber was dedicated to the relationship of the king and the deities:[25] the 'square antechamber walls were covered with long registers of deities walking in a procession; the gods faced to the left on the west wall and to the right on the north, east and south walls. A life-size image of the standing king facing the deity procession was depicted on either the south or east wall.'[26]

The decoration of the offering chamber focused on the provision of offerings for the king, assuring his eternal sustenance. On both north and south walls, the provisions for the king were displayed. The scheme of each wall was as follows: 'In front of the king was an extensive offering list, piled offerings, processions of offering bearers and cattle slaughtering.'[27]

As noted by Oppenheim (2008: 375) the offering list from the Pyramid Temple is mostly missing (so no comparable material to see if any (and which type of) offering bearers were

[25] Observations on their development and a solar cult aspect in Jancziak 2019.
[26] Oppenheim 2008, 634.
[27] Oppenheim 2008, 635.

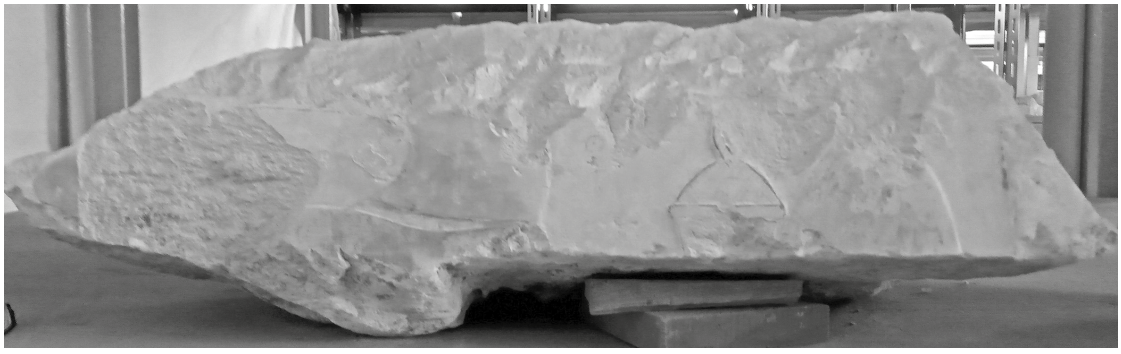
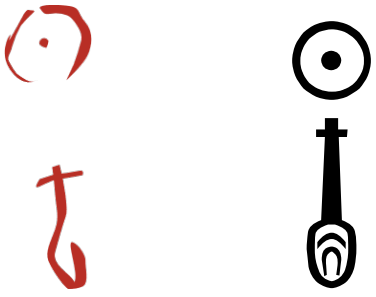


Fig. 2 Pyramid Temple fragment 96.184, provisional photo in new storage facility (Hana Navratilova, © Metropolitan Museum of Art)

labelled secondarily, as they were in the North Chapel, for instance)[28]; but displays of offerings were preserved. 'Hundreds of fragments both large and small preserve sections of offerings arranged in lavish, brightly colored compositions … these depictions must have been placed above the offering bearers and behind the offering list.' (pp. 374–375). Among these, the registration no. 96.184 is an illustrative case. Its brightly coloured composition shows piled food offerings and an elegant vessel with a lid. The polychromy covers the objects, whereas the background appears to have been left without any colours, just the fine limestone (fig. 2).

A short hieratic text written in a column is located above the offerings. It is written in an elegant hieratic hand in red ink and comprises of just two signs, Gardiner sign-list numbers N5 and F35.

## Text



1. *hrw nfr*
1. Perfect day

[28] The Middle Kingdom labelling (or lack thereof) of offering bearers of different types was investigated by Oppenheim 2020, and a New Kingdom relabelling of offering bearers in Navratilova, forthcoming.

## Commentary

Dating the inscription has some predictable limitations; a palaeography of an inscription with just two signs may well be considered inconclusive. It would not contradict a late Second Intermediate Period or an early New Kingdom date: either of the two is within the palaeography range as suggested by examples in Möller.[29]

| Example from Möller 1909–1912, vol. 2, no. 180 'Hyksoszeit, Anfang 18. Dyn.'; no scale | Deir el-Bahri, MMA 504, reign of Hatshepsut /Thutmose III, after Ragazzoli 2017a, text E.2.14; no scale | Assiut, tomb N13.1, after Verhoeven 2020; no scale; images from AKU: https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/30116 and https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/14092 (select from a large corpus—see https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/240 |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

Another plausible option might be Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, the sole rule of Thutmose III or the reign of his successor Amenhotep II (see AKU, grapheme F0400—https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/240). What makes these 18th-dynasty dating options likely is both a palaeographical probability, and context of intense secondary epigraphy activity in the precinct, datable to the reign of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.

A comparison to *nfr* signs elsewhere in the complex, with dates (the sign sizes are approximately 1–1.5 cm in height) and location, shows a substantial variability (as well as damage) that does not directly prove or disprove any dating for the 96.184 dipinto:

| **Fragment registration number** | **Location (excavation square)** | **Approximate date** | **Sign** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Column 6a,b[30] | South Temple M/21 | Thutmose III and later; this dipinto is dated to year 40 of Thutmose III, and another to Year 41. |  |
| 93.1565 | South Temple N/13 | 18th dynasty ? |  |

[29] Möller 1909–1912, vol. 1, 16: 180.

[30] See also below: the column dipinto carries an epagomenal day date.

| Fragment registration number | Location (excavation square) | Approximate date | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|
| 93.1566 | South Temple R/17 | 18th dynasty ? |  |
| 94.171 | the passage between the South Temple and the inner court of the pyramid, R/20–21 | ? |  |
| 94.989 | South Temple, L/19 | 18th dynasty ? |  |
| 94.1383 | the passage between the South Temple and the inner court of the pyramid, R/20 | 18th dynasty? |  |
| 94.1413 | Pyramid Temple | 18th dynasty; reign of Thutmose III? Texts referring to Thutmose III |  |

For the sake of completeness, several options should be offered for a reading of this very short text. This text column is most likely to be read *hrw nfr*, 'perfect', 'beautiful', or 'optimal' day. The translation analysis and connotations of this expression *hrw nfr* are investigated below; as will be explained further, the 'perfect day' can be considered contextually appropriate when located within an offering scene.

An alternative interpretive approach would consider the vertical inscription to be a name. For the name, two readings would be possible.

i. Herunefer; this is a well-attested name throughout the Middle and the New Kingdoms (Ranke 1935, 231,4). In the Middle Kingdom Herunefer was used as both a male and female name. Its presence as a signature on the wall would invite considerations of Middle Kingdom staff presence or New Kingdom visitors. However, the names seldom appear without any further identification, such as titles, affiliation, or any reference to the interest and purposes of the writer, or without a classifier (which would also be missing in this case); leaving one's name on a temple wall comes with an agenda of self-fashioning and display of social, cultural and devotional capital. An isolated, undetermined name is therefore unlikely. Suspect Middle Kingdom secondary epigraphy in Medum is also written in vertical columns, but the texts have an A1 classifier indicating a personal name.[31]
ii. The signs could also refer to Ranefer, a name attested with similar writings (Ranke 1935, 219, 10); however, the same limitations as for the name Herunefer apply. Isolated signs like this example would be an exceptional way to present a personal name.

[31] See Petrie 1892, pl. XXXII, nos. II and III.

## Context of other secondary epigraphy in the Pyramid Temple

The placement of the dipinto is specific—it is almost hidden in the pile of offerings and the red colour of the ink makes it melt into the background—at least from a modern viewer's perspective. It was also higher up on the wall, as most of the piled offerings are above the procession of offering bearers. At a minimum there was the height of the dado—at least 1.5 metres, then one or three registers of figures. Already from a New Kingdom perspective, this inscription must have been high up on the wall, and not within easy reach. It is not clear how it could be accessed—either the scribe had something to stand on or sand/debris had built up in the chamber.[32]

The location/placement and choice of ink colour has parallels, but also differences, when compared to most of the visitors' texts in the pyramid precinct. Many wall placements involved door thicknesses and dados; and avoided direct contact with the reliefs, although examples of contrasting behaviour do appear. Usually, black ink in longer visitors' texts occupied dados or door thicknesses as shown by examples in the Pyramid Temple and the South Temple.[33] Red ink labels inserted in the scenes were hitherto found mainly in the North Chapel in the grid-like offerings list—they are secondary names added to the figures of small kneeling offering bearers.[34] This short dipinto is parallel to those secondary labels of offering bearers, and as such it differs from most of the secondary epigraphy production in the pyramid precinct.

The quantitative assessment of secondary epigraphy in the pyramid precinct had initially showed that about 50 out of approximately 200 of graffiti/dipinti were identified in the Pyramid Temple area. These figures, already approximate, were drafted after the survey of secondary epigraphy in the precinct conducted in 2010–2012. In short, they indicated that about 25% of secondary epigraphy in the precinct originated in the Pyramid Temple.

Since then, the graffiti survey brought the number of secondary epigraphy features (individual or clusters) across the precinct to over 370. The number of secondary epigraphy features in the Pyramid Temple (counting some clusters as one feature, however), is still approximately 50. The Pyramid Temple may be overtaken by the South Temple—and Causeway—as the most prolific contributors to the corpus of secondary epigraphy—offering larger surfaces, or more accessible spaces.

This number crunching has some clear limitations; some pieces with dipinti clusters, especially on door thicknesses, are counted as one feature, although they carry several dipinti/graffiti possibly by different hands. Nevertheless, the statistics may suggest that the available quantity of limestone surfaces was linked to the extensive and intensive production of secondary epigraphy.

[32] The locations were discussed with A. Oppenheim over 2018 to 2022, who kindly provided an analysis of the wall decoration scheme; inconsistencies and wrong conclusions remain the sole responsibility of this writer.

[33] For example, South Temple parallels, reg. numbers 94.989, 94.1413, and see further examples from Pyramid Temple listed below.

[34] Navratilova, forthcoming.

Another factor, which should be accorded some importance, is the location and contents of the primary decoration. Based on analysis of select examples from the North Chapel,[35] i.e., the abovementioned 'red labels' of the kneeling offering bearers, it is possible to claim that people interacted with specific decoration, not at random. The Pyramid Temple and North Chapel finds complement each other as evidence for this targeted behaviour. With this caveat: The Pyramid Temple has a commented-on *group of offerings*; the North Chapel has labelled *offering bearers*.

Concerning locations chosen for secondary epigraphy, in the Pyramid Temple there is more than one pattern of interaction with the primary decoration. It was already noted in brief that highly visible segments of secondary epigraphy are located on some specific architectural features. Let us note the categories of surfaces that had attracted secondary epigraphy in more detail:

**i. doorways**.[36] This tendency is shared with the South Temple and some of the Queens' chapels. It is likely that there were four doorways in the Pyramid Temple. The finds include one large door thickness fragment with green and yellow stripes and graffiti[37], one smaller fragment (98.812, with several hieratic graffiti) with characteristic green and yellow stripes, and a number of door thickness fragments (examples 98.408, unnumbered R/29c, and others) with yellow paint and significant graffiti presence, as well as small fragments with light green or yellow background colour. On a South Temple door thickness specimen 94.989, the stripes seem to function as a sort of a 'ruler' to position at least some of the dipinti. Alongside larger fragments preserving significant parts of doorframes, we also possess a number of small, in some instances indeed diminutive, fragments with characteristic striped colouring (mostly light green and yellow), which has been identified as typical for the door thicknesses.

Following previous observations,[38] the door thickness surfaces are flat, relatively pale coloured (yellow and green stripes), and the location was potentially considered as a liminal, controlling space. All of these reasons might have contributed to their status as favoured writing surfaces. Door thickness fragments with secondary epigraphy from the Pyramid Temple include the following registration numbers, including joined fragments and joined groups of fragments: '93.02', 94.1398, 94.1399(1)+(2), 96.226+96.466, 96.243(1) et al., 98.408, 98.931, 98.1589(4) et al., 99.641, 00.52 and 00.845.

**ii. dados (soubassement).** One larger dado fragment (99.271) with several hieratic graffiti shows feet of a procession of spirits of Nekhen. Other, mostly yellow-coloured, fragments could have also come from the yellow-coloured parts of the door thickness or from equally yellow-coloured stripe of the temple's dado. Its colour scheme was as follows: the dado was marked by a narrow black line (the ground line of the figures of the lowest register) followed by a red stripe, the abovesaid yellow stripe, and a broad black lowermost part. The same dado style was used throughout the pyramid complex.

[35] Navratilova, forthcoming.
[36] The Pyramid Temple contained complex doorframes, Oppenheim 2008, pls 11–12.
[37] Pyramid Temple unnumbered, see Arnold 2002, pl. 35B, and further op. cit. p. 57–58.
[38] Earlier outline of dipinti locations was provided in Navratilova, Allen, and Arnold 2013.

All of their coloured stripes could have had added graffiti or dipinti. For black or red ink dipinti, the yellow stripe was a frequent choice. The pale flat surface may have lent itself well to ink-written texts, at least where colouring was concerned. Dado fragments with secondary epigraphy from the Pyramid Temple include also registration numbers 93.318, 93.367 (4) et al., 93.436, 93.1554(1)–(6), 93.1559, 93.1560, 93.1561, 98.195(1), 99.271 et al., 00.254(1), including joined fragments. Carved graffiti appear on the red and black surfaces as well.

**iii. relief scenes from the temple walls.** A significant number comes from the processions of deities, which was located in the square antechamber.[39] Secondary texts and figures interact with the primary texts and figures in several ways. Topologically speaking, they may avoid them, using flat surfaces between elements of primary decoration, or they may just ignore any boundaries and be written across figures. The second option is less frequent. Relief wall fragments with secondary epigraphy from the Pyramid Temple coming from diverse wall locations constitute a large part of the secondary epigraphy finds.

What could have drawn the attention of the visitors? The Pyramid Temple of Senwosret III represents a fascinating link in the chain of the royal temple development, although this is a distinctly etic perspective. Yet, even in an emic perspective, the visitors were not likely to miss that this Pyramid Temple targeted the relationship of the king and the gods, and the theme was further celebrated in another structure within the pyramid complex, the South Temple. 'Scenes in Senwosret III's Pyramid Temple show the king either as a passive observer of events (offering chamber, square antechamber) or acted upon by deities (purification). No *tableaux* can be identified that show the active king (for examples smiting foreigners or hunting animals). … those "active" scenes omitted in the Pyramid Temple (domination of foreigners, *sed*-festival) are among the key components of Senwosret III's south temple.'[40]

In terms of contents, do the secondary texts or figures respond to the primary decoration or complement it? In the North Chapel, secondary captions were used to label the offering bearers (of two types: small kneeling figures in a grid offering list, and larger figures of standing bearers), and similar or identical behaviour was observed in Theban tombs.[41] In other temples and tombs, secondary epigraphy may be in other more or less direct interaction with the primary: being inspired, repeating figures, locating secondary texts and figures in a clear meaningful relationship to the primary material. Examples from other sites (limited to New Kingdom for practical purposes) illustrate the likely variability of the secondary response to the spaces and content of monuments, for instance:

i. more or less elaborate repetition of figures or signs from the primary decoration (temple of Ramesses II, Abydos);[42]

[39] Oppenheim 2008, 633–634.
[40] Oppenheim 2008, 636.
[41] Ragazzoli 2017b, Den Doncker 2012.
[42] Navratilova 2021.

ii. some degree of response to the primary decoration (Saqqara,[43] Assiut,[44] Beni Hassan[45])
iii. aligning secondary texts or figures with primary decoration to enhance efficacy or importance of the secondary material (Deir el-Bahri, Thebes[46])
iv. creation of new locations for identity, commemoration and devotion in places that were left undecorated in the primary scheme (Karnak,[47] also Abydos, temple of Ramesses II[48]).

For interpreting the fragment 96.184, points ii. and iii. may be perhaps most relevant.

## A 'beautiful day', a 'festival day', or an 'optimal, perfect day'?

Egyptologists have embraced the study of *hrw nfr*, and in particular of '*ỉrỉ hrw nfr,*' with enthusiasm that seems to mirror its assumed ancient meaning—or plurality of meanings: as an injunction to a festivity, to a good time, and/or a time well-spent. Specialists involved in the *hrw nfr* decades-long debate used:

i. funerary sources that refer to festivities of both living and the dead, and some of which suggest life continuing after death in its fulness;
ii. literary sources,[49] which pointed to celebratory occasions, fine meals and enjoyment of company of others, as well as to a feeling of uncertainty, whether the eternal *hrw nfr* is indeed offering all the pleasures of its earthly predecessor; the latter tension of uncertainty is seen as represented by some of the Harper's songs.

[43] See nonroyal context in Saqqara explored by van Pelt and Staring 2020, 146: 'Because of the graffitists' close relationship with the deceased, it is certainly possible that these inscriptions were envisaged as very direct and personal appeals and may have involved human sentiments of direct involvement, admiration, and concern. It is even possible that piety and self-interest were tangled and the graffitists wished to share in the wealth of their powerful overseers by associating themselves with figures in the tomb decoration, which would allow them to partake of any offerings made in the tomb and benefit from the magical efficacy of the tomb's representations.'

[44] Verhoeven 2020.

[45] Hassan 2016, note also the naming and identification of the tombs. The identification varies in accuracy. But note the importance of offering scenes, p. 49: 'Most of the visitors' graffiti, as in the tomb of Antefoker (TT60) and Beni Hassan, are written within scenes of daily life such as travels, crafts, trades, animals feeding, and hunting, or presentations of offerings to the owner of the tomb. These locations could reflect the intended response of the author of the graffito to the deceased's wish to encourage the visitors of his tomb to take part in his funerary cult.'

[46] Ongoing research by David Wieczorek and Miroslaw Barwik in Deir el-Bahri; Ragazzoli 2013, 2017b for Theban tombs.

[47] Frood 2013; Frood, Salvador, and Jones 2020; Salvador 2019.

[48] Navratilova 2021.

[49] With a specific attention to the Ramesside texts, Castro 2020.

One of major discussions about the interpretation and connotations of this seemingly unequivocal phrase took place in the 1970s. Herman te Velde took *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* as the topic for his inaugural lecture at Groningen, possibly his professional *hrw nfr*. He drew on examples from literary and religious texts from across Egyptian history, without making a significant chronological or thematic division, finding *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* a suitable description of festivity, of enjoyment of life (noted in the Harper's songs), but also of a perfect, fulfilled day of a royal or divine victory over chaos.[50] A 'festival day' then, resonant with sentiments similar to the Christian hymn 'All the fair beauty of earth' by Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus (530–609),[51] yet with undercurrents of a hedonist enjoyment implied. In te Velde's understanding, the 'good, full day' stood for the vitality of the ordered world as indicated in the hymns such as the 'Song of Isis' from Philae: 'The day is good and worth celebrating, because the fully conscious life can develop and culminate.'[52]

David Lorton, following and developing an earlier debate, downplayed the potentially hedonistic interpretation of *ỉrỉ hrw nfr*, but also of other expressions, such as *šmsw ỉb*, (following the heart) proposing a different tone: these expressions might have indicated an advice to follow one's conscience, and to act in a measured, well-adjusted manner, finely but meticulously,[53] with an ancient variant of restrained civility studied in such detail by Norbert Elias as typical for early modern and modern Western societies.[54] This restrained civility in a modern context has been often displayed in the context of conviviality and commensality. Lorton also particularly emphasised the expected ancient conviviality aspect of *ỉrỉ hrw nfr*, using a wide-ranging list of sources, from *Contendings of Horus and Seth* to the stela of Taimhotep.

Taking a more comprehensive view, Jan Assmann identified an aspect of *hrw nfr* as an exhortation to an active, fulfilled life, transcending the immediate feast day scene, again assuming that the same transcendence may be seen in *šmsw ỉb*: '"Folge Deinem Herzen". Ist ein Aufruf zu vita activa.'[55] This vita activa would concern mainly the living. John Darnell pointed out a *hrw nfr* as a significant day for joy but also royal decisions.[56]

Assmann noted that some Egyptian texts already contest the doubting, seemingly hedonistic character of some of the Harper's songs.[57] The 'hedonistic' (focused on carpe diem) and 'orthodox' (targeting the ultimate benefit—good afterlife) harper songs are juxtaposed in TT 50 (Neferhotep), with a third text doubting the hedonistic perspective[58]. The tension is addressed further in the tomb of Nefersekheru near Minya,[59] where Jürgen Osing assumes a resolution in favour of the afterlife beliefs, harmonizing the carpe diem call with the project of leaving a good memory based on a good life (so a variation on vita activa,

50 Te Velde 1971, 17–21.
51 Its chorus is 'Hail thee, festival day' and the text is sung on varied tunes, including but not limited to 'Salve festa dies' by R. Vaughan Williams, in a number of Anglophone protestant hymnals.
52 Te Velde 1971, 21.
53 Lorton 1975, 23.
54 Elias 2012.
55 Assmann 1977, 79.
56 Darnell 2014, 250.
57 Discussed by Osing 1992.
58 Assmann 1977, 78.
59 Osing 1992.

not a wasted life).[60] The tensions voiced in Egyptian literature, specifically from the Middle Kingdom onwards, were included in a 'poetic containment', which 'does not necessarily negate the potential subversion or make a poem cultural propaganda.'[61]

A merger of views was offered by Mette Gregersen in 2015.[62] Gregersen uses a large part of Lorton's argument (but blends resources from different time periods rather extensively), and develops a line of explanation that focuses i. on the meaning of *nfr* as 'complete' or 'optimal,' (to which 'perfect' may be added) and ii. on the context of funerary repast and offerings. She considered specific practices linked or possibly linked to *hrw nfr*. Whilst the funerary applicability of *hrw nfr* as a feast of the deceased and for the deceased is reasonably certain, Gregersen mapped New Kingdom tomb scenes where *hrw nfr* appears in context of explicit offering scenes or activities. The offerings associated with *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* include fragrant substances such as myrrh, resin, fine oil, and moringa oil.[63]

Interestingly, among the substances associated with *hrw nfr*, myrrh—*ꜥntỉw*—also appears in the visitors' formula *hwj p.t n ꜥntỉw wꜣḏ ḏfḏfꜥs m snṯr ḥr tp n.t ḥw.t-nṯr*. However, in this context myrrh is usually listed together with incense.' Drunkenness, myrrh, and *hrw nfr* are frequently associated, but eating is not stressed in festival descriptions of *hrw nfr*.'[64]

As determined by Ursula Verhoeven, the motif of a myrrh rain and incense shower appears in the Memphite secondary epigraphy material, frequently in Assiut, and also in Beni Hassan, but so far not yet in secondary epigraphy texts in Thebes, at least not in those graffiti and dipinti found *in situ* on the walls; it has, however, been recognized on some Theban ostraca.[65] Although the list of substances differs, the environment is still that of a funerary chapel or temple, both in the visitors' formula and in the above context of *hrw nfr*, which would thus be linked strongly with the funerary festivities embedded in the context of commemoration and feasts located in the necropolis. Myrrh and fine oil are referred to by the Harper's songs as substances relevant also for earthly enjoyment, and 'fragrance of the myrrh' appears among the life goods in P. Berlin 3024 (*Lebensmüde*), albeit in a specific context: 'Death is in my sight today, like myrrh's smell'.[66] The overlaps of occasions and substances to be enjoyed or even shared by the living and the dead persist.

In words of Miriam Lichtheim, 'declarations of joy and happiness were voiced in conjunction with accounts of successful action and moral worth,' whilst 'happiness was the natural by-product of the well-lived life.'[67] Lichtheim opted for *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* as 'making a happy day', including the above nuanced understanding of happiness as including an achievement of good memory.[68] For the living, an active, measured life, where no time is wasted on inappropriate matters (including worrying about things one cannot change),[69]

60 Osing 1992, 21–22.
61 Parkinson 2015, 181.
62 Gregersen 2015.
63 Gregersen 2015, 60–68.
64 Darnell 2014, 250 with further references.
65 Verhoeven 2020, 224–255. Memphite corpus: Navratilova 2015b, 362–365, Beni Hassan: Hassan 2016, Assiut: Verhoeven 2020, 39–40, 75, 81–82; ostraca in Thebes: Hassan 2017.
66 Lichtheim 1997, 50; in *Dialogue of a Man with his Ba*: Allen 2011, 155, 225.
67 Lichtheim 1997, 54.
68 Lichtheim 1997, 55 and see above.
69 Assmann 1977, 74–80.

could well have been part of the appeal, an appeal that went beyond the immediate festive moment.

Uncertainties of the Egyptological debate seem to mirror the potential uncertainties and culturally productive tensions in the Egyptian culture when it had to contend with human vitality and death and with communicating the identity message encoded in a tomb to its several audiences. A close but tense communication of dead and living is only to be expected: Egyptians were in touch with their dead, they shared concerns with them, expected their successful dead to have a good afterlife, and intercede in this life (they could also be concerned that the dead could cause harm to the living). To some extent, it is possible to agree with Gregersen's view that *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* was to express '*joie de vivre*, whether it is among the dead or the living',[70] although modern sensitivities have a difficulty coping with the inherent paradox of *joie de vivre* among the dead. Not so the ancient audiences, as 'Egyptians did not share our binary opposition of life and death.'[71] It may be in fact relevant to see the meeting of the living and the dead as a liminal process, but not between opposites, but between distinct modes of being. The Harper's song, which also thematises *hrw nfr*, might have been sung to prompt the necessary separation between the world of the living and the dead, but the song, its performance and the musicians were acting as a medium.[72] These were active and lively dead. The paradox is lessened further, if we realise that whilst the *joie de vivre* culminated on a feast day, it well may have reflected, as noted by Assmann, wider issues of good life and good afterlife, which obviously transcended that moment of culmination.

A feast, it has been noted, is a 'total social act' in many cultures (in terminology inherited from Marcel Mauss), and constitutes 'a primary arena'[73] for displays of religious and secular customs, for hierarchies, for celebrations of gods, dead and humans, for mobilization and display of resources, recognition of shared traditions, time structure, consolidation of community, and the list could go on. An Egyptian feast that constituted a prominent embodiment of *hrw nfr* may be seen in those terms, including its particular aspects of good food and drink: 'for ancient Egypt, as for other complex societies or indeed for so many social interactions of any type, who one eats and drinks with, what conventions surround these most fundamental human activities, and how one can escape from everyday conventions through what is consumed and how it is done—all these are essential questions for understanding ancient societies and what held them together.'[74] In such a 'total social act' dead and living may coexist and their meeting embodies the value of a good life and afterlife composed of good days.

The *joie de vivre* aspect could have been certainly present at funerary banquets, or other hospitable occasions that accompanied festival days. The feast emphasis might have been on the sociability (ultimately the main point of interest also of the proverbial Epicurean sensibilities) as well as on the abundance, and indulgence.[75] In addition, what appears as ultimate indulgence and overflowing luxury to modern eyes, could have been appropriate

[70] Gregersen 2015, 85.
[71] Quirke 2015, 218.
[72] Emerit 2016, 161–162.
[73] O'Connor 2015, 89, with references to previous works by Marcel Mauss.
[74] Baines 2014, 18.
[75] O'Connor 2015, 2–4.

luxury for an ancient feast day, even if wisdom texts of the same age proposed some restraint at the table. Whether decorum was expected and not always maintained, or if the religious effect of altered states of consciousness[76] was used to explain, or to excuse one's inebriation, is of course a moot point.

To sum up this divergence, the differences in interpretation concern: i. a general ethical level—be hedonist or be measured in enjoyment of life (or keep a productive tension between the two), with respect to an afterlife, and ii. the specific sum of pleasurable things that *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* could include, from a rich meal to mind-altering substances (specifically drink, but also incense)[77] to an enjoyment of sexuality. For Lorton, '*hrw nfr*, sometimes when used alone, and always in the expression *ỉrỉ hrw nfr*, is applied to the enjoyment of a fine meal, whether secular or religious. In the religious sphere, the meal can be the funerary banquet, or, … it can refer to divine sacrifices, since these are conceived of as meals for the gods.'[78] Although Lorton may seem to offer a more specific, restricted meaning of a 'beautiful day', ultimately his and te Velde's views are not set so wide apart as it might appear,[79] as te Velde pointed out the use of *hrw nfr* to designate such exalted occasions as a coronation, and culmination of religious festivity. The *hrw nfr* would ultimately be a time of enjoyment, as well as civility, and a vindication of rich culture that enabled both of the above. The dichotomy of a restrained festivity and conviviality and a hedonistic interpretation may, of course be exaggerated by the modern observers. We may be getting some of our thoughts on ancient 'collective joy' confused.[80]

Eventually, the emphasis on *hrw nfr* might have meant different things in different contexts. In other words, we may be *framing*[81] *hrw nfr* the wrong way, trying to fit it into one frame whereas it might have operated in several distinct frames. *Ỉrỉ hrw nfr* might have referred to a moment in time that had to be captured, as well as to a concept of living a good—memorable—life. We may need one frame, or at least an angle of that frame, to analyse tomb texts, ranging from banquet captions where *hrw nfr* appears, to the Harper's songs, and another frame to analyse literary references to commensality and conviviality.

The studies in conviviality emphasise the spontaneity of occasions that is in many ways as essential as is the choreographed tradition.[82] John Baines noted on Egyptian forms of conviviality 'As with so much else, it is also essential to avoid taking these matters too earnestly.'[83] How does this context of *joie de vivre*—and of the epistemic need to avoid taking these matters too earnestly—relate to a *hrw nfr* dipinto carefully hidden in a pile of offerings?

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[76] In some interpretations of the *hrw nfr* related funerary banquets, altered states of consciousness are assumed, Manniche 2003, 44–45.

[77] Both appear in context of some major religious feasts—'Talfest' being a case in point; summary: Wiebach 1986, 273.

[78] Lorton 1975, 29.

[79] In Lorton's words (1975, 24), 'he concedes more to my viewpoint than he apparently realizes.'

[80] As B. Ehrenreich suggested in her analysis of anthropologists, ethnographers and historians grappling with the idea of vivid, ecstatic, joy of festivities outside of modern Western framework (Ehrenreich 2008).

[81] On the concept see Goffman 1975.

[82] See O'Connor 2015, also Dunbabin 2003.

[83] Baines 2014, 18.

The location of the dipinto invites further reconsideration: if this was a private chapel, it would be a funerary and commemorative space in the focus. But it is a royal temple, commemorating the king and the role of kingship and the king's relationship with the gods, where the offering aspect could be interpreted as an add-on.[84] The New Kingdom visitors may be seen as 'privatising' the royal sacred space concerned with kingship and its divine connection by an emphasised funerary function that concerned them more closely.

In New Kingdom tombs, the expression *ỉrỉ hrw nfr* is included in texts centred on the deceased and on occasion translated as 'hold a feast day',[85] emphasising the context of exalted atmosphere of a religious feast as well as conviviality. The complex symbolic character of these representations—'banquet scenes … must be clearly distinguished from the actual banquets they are modelled on'[86]—requires their modern observer to realise that in the tombs, 'the deceased's personal and professional identity as well as the underlying religious and cultural trends of Egypt were presented, preserved, and projected into this world and the eternal time in the afterlife.'[87] The deceased are told to have a good day in the afterlife, and the event is concretely localized in their tomb: *n kꜣ≠k ỉr hrw nfr n ḥw.t≠k nfr.t n nḥḥ*.[88]

The deceased and the living meet on festive occasions under divine auspices. The Feast of the Valley (or, geographically more accurately perhaps, Feast of the Wadi[89]) provided one such colourful opportunity staged within the Theban sacred space[90], although not necessarily in the tomb chambers, but perhaps in tents in a tomb court or other similar locations.[91] Other feasts in necropoleis elsewhere might have afforded similar context.[92] An oft repeated phrase accompanying significant scenes is likely to have a meaning including but not limited to a simple invitation to have a good time, or dine with civility with the living and the dead. *hrw nfr*, and texts articulating its presence, could stand for many things—the unsettling tension of views on the afterlife, the decorum-bound fulfilment of conviviality and sociability that can bend and debate the rules and customs,[93] a call to a full life, which could mean different things to different people even within the same cultural network.

The short secondary text column could also be a pun aimed at other visitors, whether coming simultaneously with the writer or later on; they too were enjoined to celebrate *hrw nfr*, whether in connection with the Dahshur necropolis or elsewhere. Could the precinct

[84] About functions of the royal temples and other elements within pyramid complexes see also Arnold 1977, 1997, Jánosi 1995, 2020, Oppenheim 2021, Verner 2020.

[85] E. g., Brack and Brack 1977, 33; Brack and Brack 1980, 24.

[86] Fox 1985, 246.

[87] Hartwig 2004, 130.

[88] E. g., the tomb of Userhat TT 56, well preserved text, Beinlich-Seber and Shedid 1987, 55, Abb. 19 Text 11. This looks like an overall proposition; a *hrw nfr* wish in a context of festival drinking on p. 57, the text accompanies a scene where a vessel with drink is being offered to the deceased.

[89] Bietak 2012; Baines 2014, 12.

[90] Wiebach 1986, Schott 1953.

[91] Baines 2014, 12.

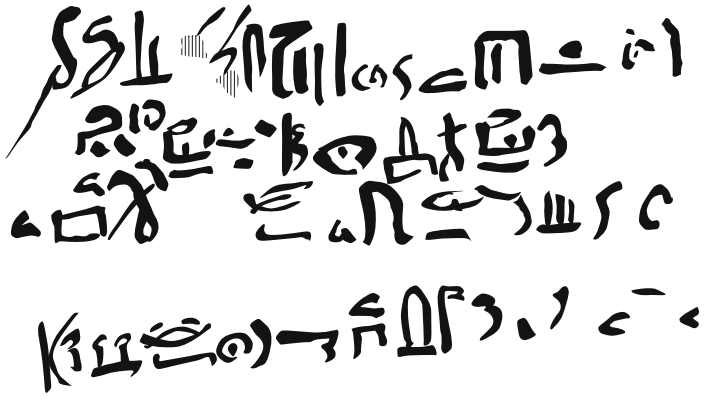
[92] Festival of Sokar in Memphis: Gaballa and Kitchen 1969, Weiss 2022, with further references, or festival(s) in Abydos: for an outline of this site see Effland and Effland 2013.

[93] Compare Bryan 2015: acceptance of drink to excess is shown in Theban tombs in a feast context, but also refusal.

of Senwosret III take on some of the characteristics of the sacred spaces of the Theban necropolis which served for the purpose of the *Talfest*, a meeting place with gods and kings? Not many visitors' texts are directly dated to identifiable feast days in the Memphite area but they could refer to the feasts regardless. The wine jars from the precinct of Senwosret III, some possibly of an 18th dynasty and others of a Ramesside date,[94] are of course easily linked to thoughts about religious celebrations on site that included moments of drunkenness (as referred to by Ramesside visitors in Abusir),[95] but their presence on site might have been more prosaic, such as linked to a workforce (and its administrators) deployed during the demolition.

## The birthday of Isis

The 'perfect day' in question might nevertheless have also referred to a very specific point in time. Although secondary epigraphy in the Memphite pyramid complexes does not regularly refer to major festival days, there are references to festivities.[96] One notable example in Dahshur stands out. The column 6a (text side A–B), found in 1992 in the area of the South Temple (excavation square M/21) carries a black ink hieratic inscription, which reads reasonably well despite its damage by significant salt encrustations:



The reconstruction of signs in the facsimile and other more detailed analyses of the dipinto are not included in this paper which focuses on the specific date indicated in this secondary inscription.

94 Personal communication, Susan Allen.

95 Navratilova 2015b, 101.

96 Direct and indirect: Abusir reference to drunkenness (cf. previous note supra) appeared in context of the cult of Mut-Sakhmet-Bastet. For Mut-Sakhmet-Bastet at Abusir see Brand 2000, 53–54, also Bardoňová and Khaled 2021; for a summary on drunkenness: Bryan 2014. For festivities on the Memphite necropolis (Dahshur was not initially considered to be part of it, cf. Rees 2022) see now also Staring 2023.

*[ḥ3.t sp]* 40*, ḥrw msw.t ꜣs.t*
*[swtw.t ỉmntt] m Mn-nfr ḥr ỉr.t mn.w*
*ỉw(.t) pw ỉr.n sḫ3 Ḫꜥ-[m-W3s.t] wꜥb […]*
*r mꜣꜣ ḥw.t nṯr n.t Ḫꜥ-k3(.w)-rꜥ […]*

Year 40, day of the birth of Isis
[strolling in the west] of Memphis to make monuments
There came the scribe Khae[mwaset and] wab-priest […]
To see the temple of Khakaura […]

The column fragment comes from the upper part of the shaft of a large papyrus-bundle column with a round socket in the smooth top surface. It has 5–6 stems preserved, and it is covered with numerous visitors' inscriptions.

The date of 'year 40', presumably of Thutmose III, is also shown on a dipinto on another fragment, 94.1409, and a close date of year 41 is shown on another dipinto on a different fragment from the same column[97].

The text is intriguing as it likely combines the *swtwt* element of 'strolling' in the necropoliscape[98] with a 'classical' *ỉw.t pw* element that articulates a targeted behaviour in context of a highly specific monumental space (*ỉr.t mnw*). Here, we focus on the festival reference.

It possibly also names two visitors, which is unexceptional, but interesting: a scribe and a *wꜥb*-priest, as do examples from other graffiti locations, both in funerary and in divine temple contexts. A full commentary on this fascinating text would stretch the word count of this paper too far: its most salient element in context of an interpretation of *ḥrw nfr* is the date. The birthday of Isis on the 4th epagomenal day[99] is also known to be a *ḥrw (pn) nfr*, although most explicitly in later texts (Dendara).[100] Was this a suitable occasion, a liminal moment in the year, when a visit to the necropolis was warranted? There clearly were literate visitors on site on that special day.

No direct connection can be made between the scribe Khaemwaset (?) writing his black-ink hieratic testimony of his presence, intentions and literacy on a column shaft in the South Temple, and the anonymous writer who deployed red ink to label the offering scene in the Pyramid Temple, within the confines of its innermost sanctuary, the offering

[97] Personal observation and information by Dieter Arnold; the 'Columns' list, and Navratilova Mss., the MMA Egyptian Dept. archive, and forthcoming publication. The dipinto referring to year 41 has verse points dividing the extensive titles and epithets of Thutmose III, see Navratilova 2015b.

[98] On which see Staring 2021 and Weiss 2022.

[99] Spalinger 1995, later discussions on identification of Isis or Isis-Sothis with day 4 or 5 Leitz 1993, Kurth and Waitkus 1994.

[100] Spalinger 1995, 41.

chamber. The short dipinto is not signed to begin with. The writing of *hrw* and *nfr* is on its own neither proving nor disproving if it might have been the same hand in the two places or not:

| Column 6a, A-B | reg. no. 96.184 |
|---|---|
|  |  |

The construction of the signs is visibly different, and not immediately conducive to suggest that the same hand, the same calligrapher, might have been responsible. Yet, variations in writing occur and for 18th dynasty manuscripts it has been established that 'different forms of the same hieratic signs regularly occur in a single text' written by the same hand.[101] A Deir el-Bahri example by a scribe Neferhotep gives two variants of *nfr* with precisely the same ambivalence of brushstrokes[102] as the two *nfr* signs from the epagomenal date and from 96.184 here; the Deir el-Bahri specimen is dated to the reign of Hatshepsut. One and the same scribe might have also possibly developed his writing style over time, as suggested by examples in Assiut,[103] including different individual sign constructions.[104]

The most convincing argument against an attempt to establish if the same writing hand might have been involved in the *hrw nfr* text and any other secondary text in the precinct is the following: there are just two signs in the shorter vertical text, making it too short for a convincing comparison. As noted by Polis (following earlier studies by Janssen,[105] Donker van Heel and van den Berg[106]) the investigation into establishing a reliable comparative methodology emphasizes 'the importance of considering groups—rather than isolated signs—and distinguished between "principal variations" (i.e., completely different ways of shaping a sign) and "incidental variations" that are characterized by their irregular occurrences in a manuscript.'[107] It is only with sufficiently large bodies of texts that individual hands and their variations may be reliably identified,[108] with repeated name, genealogy and other paleographic information in sufficient quantity. An example is the corpus in the tomb N13.1 in Assiut, where many scribal names and further information have been preserved, or the *grotte de scribes* in Deir el-Bahri.[109]

[101] Polis 2020, 556, following Megally 1971.
[102] Ragazzoli 2017a, 49 and 159–165.
[103] Verhoeven 2020, 269–272, 277–278.
[104] Compare Assiuti scribe Men Typ A, B, C but also within Typ A, Verhoeven 2020, 271.
[105] Janssen 1987, 2000.
[106] van den Berg and Donker van Heel 2000.
[107] Polis 2020, 561.
[108] Gasse 2016, 69; Janssen 1987, 2000, van den Berg and Donker van Heel 2000.
[109] Analysis of the *nfr* sign and sign group (*nfr*+*f*+*r*), Ragazzoli 2017a, 51–52.

Yet, the coincidence of a feast day visit, and a 'festival day' comment is striking and invites further thoughts in context of other circumstantial evidence, which includes, but is not limited to: i. other red ink secondary labels in the North Chapel alternating with black ink texts within the same space most likely produced by the same writer;[110] and ii. the broad similarity of the signs, even if numbers for comparison are restricted.

It is therefore plausible to suggest that the same 18th dynasty writing community[111] was responsible for both the red captions inside the decorated rooms of the Pyramid Temple, and for larger black ink texts on doorways and columns of the South Temple—and less productive to follow the idea of a specific scribe being involved in the epagomenal day dipinto and the 'festival' labelling of the offerings. This does not preclude that once the corpus is analysed palaeographically, similarities may still emerge, although the dipinto on 96.184 will be always disadvantaged by having only two signs.

If that premise is accepted as possible, the difference in colour becomes even more interesting: it invites a consideration that a different setting would require a different colour and writing decorum, for example: the more accessible 'public'[112] space of the columned court, or courts, or even a hypostyle hall enabled to locate the scribal discourse of literacy, personal commemoration and interaction within a realm of memory and a place of devotion. Longer texts appear more often and they are located on architectural elements. The more intimate temple chamber with its highly charged visual content would have required a differently nuanced interaction with existing and extensively preserved primary decoration: the texts appear close to the reliefs and not, e. g., on a door thickness only. Yet, the scribes, as is known from contemporaneous evidence in Deir el-Bahri, may also mix colours in one and the same space.[113] Both written statements were in any event linked by their, admittedly diverse, references to the affirming as well as liminal experience of festival days.

## Conclusions

The purposes and target audiences of the secondary epigraphy in the pyramid complexes are—at least where the modern observer is concerned—the opposite of strictly defined. We assume that a secondary epigraphy maker might have considered a communicative

[110] Navratilova, forthcoming.

[111] As in Western Thebes, so in Memphis, we may suggest that there was a shift in the purpose of visits to the chapels and tombs between the 18th dynasty and the Ramesside period. Not only is this suggested by known changes in phraseology (Navratilova 2006, Verhoeven 2020, 221–232), but also in prosopography of the visitors. The latter is particularly well visible in Western Thebes, with a large percentage of mixed gender visits by Ramesside pilgrims, summary Ragazzoli 2017a, 68.

[112] The concept of 'public' is of course debatable and requires to consider, for example: i. which changes took place, that concerned the function and accessibility of the temple spaces; ii. how did the higher sections of the wall become reachable? iii. were rituals for the king still being carried out in some form? The idea of 'desacralization' of the temple as a prerequisite for secondary epigraphy production was successfully contested by Salvador 2016 and 2019.

[113] Ragazzoli 2017a.

span extending from the gods and the deceased—here the king—to other visitors who might have stopped at the site. The selection of the writing locus appears multifactorial as well:

1. The surface choice might have been dictated simply by what was available in the location and accessible to a sitting or standing person.
2. The writing surface might have been chosen for reasons of writing expediency, as flat and lighter-coloured, as portions of the door thicknesses and dados were.
3. The writing surface might have been chosen for closeness to something else of interest—this factor probably led to a labelling of offering bearers in the North Chapel and of offerings in the Pyramid Temple.

Writing *hrw nfr* next to piled offerings in context of a sacred space could concern Senwosret III, the owner of a pyramid precinct, who would be expected to enjoy his post-mortem 'beautiful, optimal days'. This perspective might have contained a reflection of the visitor on the beauty and perfection of the temple decoration that captured feasts for the deceased. This line of explanation provokes thoughts on the experience of the feasting/festive context on the walls: how did the human visitors experience the temple, as they were let in, or let themselves in?

The decoration of pyramid complexes is full of activity and references to intense practices of rituals,[114] from worship and praise to provision of eternal sustenance, all them being momentous divine and human acts with a sensory impact. From temples showing complex rituals, to subterranean chambers, symbolically reverberating with voices of the gods and the deceased (although Middle Kingdom pyramid substructures are not decorated),[115] this was a space of intense communication. For anyone versed in Egyptian visual and written culture, entering an Old Kingdom or Middle Kingdom pyramid precinct must have been like entering a theatre scene with actors immersed in their piece. The timing of the visit(s), related to festival days or the special experience of the epagomenal days, must have also played a role. The regularity of visits to Western Thebes during the Feast of the Valley remains a salient parallel.

Some of our questions are likely to remain unanswerable: for example, could the New Kingdom visitors have considered the transitional status of the pyramid precinct of Senwosret III, which merged elements of an Old Kingdom tradition with the developing momentum that led to the 'mansions of millions of years?'. These New Kingdom royal temples functioned, including in their role as 'barque stations' during processional feasts, as meeting places for gods, kings, deceased[116] and—at a distance—people.[117] Or did the context evoke non-royal funerary chapels so intensely that the royal sacred space was 'privatised' by the visitors, who took on a pattern of behaviour and of communication appropriate to their own time and private context?

[114] Oppenheim 2008, 633, Verner 2020.

[115] Meyer-Dietrich 2016.

[116] For the changing roles of a royal mortuary/memorial temple see Arnold 1977, 1978, Ullmann 2002 Oppenheim 2008, 646–648, with further references.

[117] Oppenheim 2008, 651–652.

The two words enclosed to a richly laden table with offerings read as a caption, or comment to the scene of eternal sustenance provision, evocating at once the richness of a ceremonial feast and offering. The label revived the scene for the visitor, and perhaps contextualised it for their own interests. Last, but perhaps not least, the luxury of food and other costly items displayed on the walls might have incited a comment that reflected the tension surrounding imagination and images concerned with the afterlife—to whom does belong a perfect day?

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