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Papyrus Deir el-Medineh VII verso:
A personal conflict in Deir el-Medineh[1]

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I. Introduction

The textto be discussed (fig. 1) is found on the verso of Papyrus Deir el-Medineh VII of which a photograph and a hieroglyphic transcription have been previously published by Jaroslav Černý.[2] The measurements of the mostly intact document, which contains eight lines on each side, are 18 cm in length and 22 cm in width. On the recto a previous text appears to have been obliterated which may well have constituted the now lost beginning of the text on the verso. The actual text on the recto, clearly written by another hand, is economic in nature and will not be dealt with here. The verso constitutes a private communication between two unnamed men. Edward Wente has provided hitherto the only translation, which is however without commentary.[3]

The text is written in well developed Late Egyptian. Gutgesell proposes with some reservations a placement in the reign of Ramses VII based on the grain prices mentioned on the recto.[4] Wente[5] hesitantly attributes the document to the reign of Ramses IX. The text shows no overt realizations of the preposition preceding the infinitive in the circumstantial of the present, but in four cases[6] we can state a zero-

realization for certain. This also supports a dating not before the 20th dynasty.[7]

II. Transcription

(1) ... (?) ... m p3y=n ptr p3y=n rmt jw=f wj3j3=j ḥr (2) t3 w3.t, jn{n}[8] bwpw=k jrj.t n=j nkt m n3 jzr.w[9] (n) n3y=j snw.w (3) r-dr=w zp 2, bn jw=j[10] (m) n3

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[2] J. Černý, *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir el-Médineh*, I (Le Caire 1978), 19f. with pls. 23 and 23a. The document can presently be found at IFAO, Cairo, as Mme. Anna Minault-Gout was so kind to have informed us.

[3] E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (Atlanta 1990), 152f.

[4] M. Gutgesell, *Die Datierung der Ostraka und Papyri aus Deir el-Medineh und ihre ökonomische Interpretation*, Teil I. *Die 20. Dynastie*, II (Hildesheim 1983), pp. 501, 527, 530.

[5] Wente, *Letters*, 152.

[6] L. 1: *jw=f wj3j3*, 1. 3f.: *jw=k šm.t*, 1. 7: *jw=j gmj*; L. 8: *jw=j t3j*.

[7] Cf. Jean Winand, *Études de néo-égyptien, 1: La morphologie verbale* (Liège 1992), 414.

[8] There are several alternatives for interpreting this hieratic group:

1) *grḥ* (here participle form). This would lead to a translation 'the completed way', which does not make very much sense.

2) *wnn* as already suggested in Černý's transcription, but this does not allow a syntactically feasible interpretation.

3) *nn* which could be understood as part of a corrupted orthography of the conjunction *jnn* which would however make better sense than the other two suggestions. This is the option preferred by Wente, *Letters*, 152.

4) *nn* furthermore can be taken as part of a—likewise unattested—writing for the question marker *jn*. Compare the two very similar writings and cited by J. Černý and S. I. Groll 1984, *A Late Egyptian Grammar*, Rome 1984, 552f.

This is the solution we favor here.

[9] Cf. *Wb.* 1, 130. We consider this interpretation preferable to the rendering {j}qd (Wb. 5, 75–77) apparently chosen by Wente, *Letters*, 152, based on the following: 1) The determinative supports our reading, 2) we cannot otherwise account for the *j* which is clearly visible in the hieratic, 3) it seems difficult to account for the numerus taking a translation as 'manner'.

[10] This is a difficult passage. We suggest an unusual orthography of *bn jw=j* understanding what J. Winand, *Études de néo-égyptien* (Liège 1992), 1, 510ff. designates as *construction analogique du futur III* (see P. J. Frandsen, *An Outline of the Late Egyptian Verbal System* [Copenhagen 1974], 227ff.). Obviously, Wente, *Letters*, 152f. also had this in mind. The writing of *bn jw=j* can be compared to the one cited by J. F. Quack, "Philologische Miszellen 2," *LingAeg* 3 (1993), 152, ex (11).
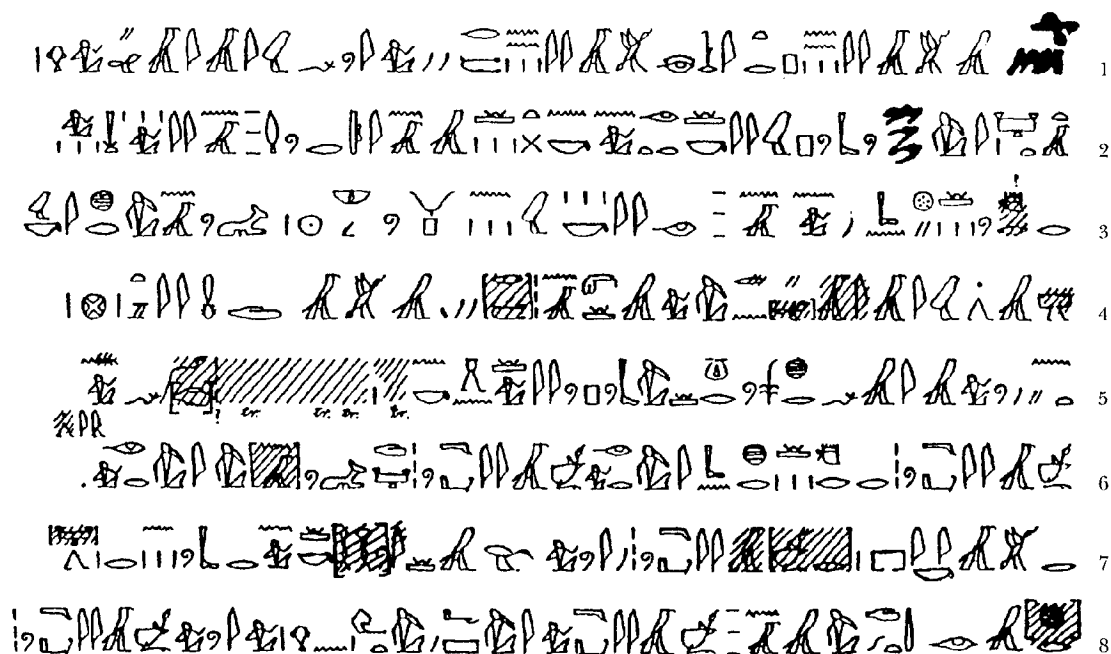
Fig. 1. Pap. Deir el-Medineh VII verso.

*(j).jry=k n=w[11] wp jwn3, ḥr jw=k (4) šm.t (r) wj3j[3]
rn=j m-b3ḥ n3 [rm]ṯ.(w) m p3 dmj (5) nty tw=j m.jm=
f, ḥr sw gr, bwpw=j jnj n=k [. . . (j).ḏ] d=f n=j: (6) ṯ3j=
w r-ḏr=w, ḥr bn j.jrj=j ṯ3j=w dy jw[n3], j.jrj=j jyj.t (7) r
p3y=k pr [r ṯ] 3j=w, jw=j gmj j[w w3ḥ]=k n=j r-bnr,
(8) [ḥ] r m-jrj mdww.t m n3 (j).ṯ3j=j, j.ˁš ḥ3.t n ḥr=j, jw=
j (ḥr) ṯ3j=w*

III. Translation

(1) . . . when we saw our man repulsing[12] me on
(2) the way. Have you not made anything for me
out of all the tamarisk wood of my (3) brothers?
Am I not going to be among those for whom you
make a feast any more? But you (4) went out and
blasphemed my name in front of the people of
the village/town (5) in which I live, and then he[13]
does not say anything. Did I not bring you (. . .)[14]
of(?) which(?) he told(?) me (6) to bring[15] them
all (to you[16])? And for this reason[17] I did not
take them from here, rather I came (7) to your
house to take them and I found[18] your having left
(them)[19] out for me. (8) So do not discuss[20] that

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[11] This writing of *n=w* occurs also in A. H. Gardiner, *LES*,
38, 14. See ibid. for further examples.

[12] We translate it in accordance with *wj3, Wb* I, 272 3, fur-
ther cf. *wj3wj3* (*Wb* I, 272, 9f., and discussed by J. F. Borg-
houts, "A Deputy of a Gang Knows his Business," in: R. J.
Demarée and J. J. Janssen [eds.], *Gleanings from Deir el-
Medina* [Leiden 1982], 88). However, all other occurrences
outside of this text are used intransitively (Borghouts, *Deputy*,
n. 56 on p. 94f.).

[13] The pronoun *sw* is presumably coreferential with the
person referred to as *p3y=n rmṯ* above.

[14] The traces at the beginning of the lacuna could corre-
spond to a variety of possibilities, one of which is the read-
ing *ḥt* as suggested by Wente, *Letters*, 153.

[15] In *ṯ3j* we assume an infinitive used functionally as an
imperative, cf. P. J. Frandsen, *An Outline of the Late Egyptian
Verbal System* (Copenhagen 1974), 262.

[16] See below, end of IV.

[17] See below, V, 5.

[18] For content clauses after *gmj* introduced by *jw* see
D. Sweeney, "The Nominal Object Clause of Verbs of Percep-
tion in Non-Literary Late Egyptian," in: G. Englund / P. J.
Frandsen, *Crossroad* (Kobenhavn 1986), 342f. and 353–56.

[19] There is no room for an object pronoun in the hier-
atic text.

[20] For the various meanings of *mdw m* cf. A. G. McDowell,
Jurisdiction in the Workmen's Community of Deir el-Medina (Lei-
den 1990), 20f.

which I took away. But help me go ahead[21] when I take them (to him)!

IV. The Notion of Bringing and Taking

Crucial for the understanding of the text are the vectorial verbs *jnj* and *ṯȝj*,[22] which supply important information as to the speech situation. In Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic these verbs are semantically identical; however their distribution is determined by pragmatic factors: *jnj* designates a motion towards either the locuteur (the actant referred to by first person pronouns) or the interlocuteur (who is referred to by second person pronouns) of the actual speech act, while *ṯȝj* expresses movements in any other direction.[23]

The use of *ṯȝj* in the section *ḥr bn j.jrj=j ṯȝj=w dy jw[nȝ], j.jrj=j jyj.t r pȝy=k pr [r tȝ]ṯȝj=w* (ls. 6f.) makes it clear that the objects involved in the transport cannot have been brought to the author of the transmission or to the house of the letter's recipient respectively but to a location of a third party that we understand as being the aforementioned *pȝy=n rmṯ*.

Both instances of *ṯȝy* in l. 8 have to be understood by analogy.

The expression [(j).d]d=f n=j: *ṯȝj=w r-dr=w* (ll. 5f.) does not render a concrete interpretation because there is no means of knowing the location of the speech act referred to by *dd*. In the interest of textual coherence we take the action as having taken place in the direction of the recipient of the communication.

V. Interpretation

The text concerns the affairs of three unnamed persons: the author of the communication (A), its recipient (B), and an individual referred to as *pȝy=n rmṯ* in line 1 (C). The exact relationship of C in respect to A is unknown to us.

In the following, we will provide a possible reconstruction of what happened in chronological order.

The proposed scenario is not the only possible one, but from the point of textual coherency and economy of assumption it seems to us the

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[21] The usual rendering of the term (j).ꜥš ḥȝ.t (WB I 227, 10f.) is 'pilot' or 'to act as a pilot'. In the following we list all thirteen occurrences of it that we are aware of, some of which have been supplied to us by the generous and timely assistance of Prof. Dr. Reineke and the Wörterbuch-staff: **M.K.** (manuscript from the N.K.): Admonitions 12,5. **N.K.**: J. Černý/A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca* (Oxford 1957), pl. 89,10; E. Naville: *The Temple of Deir-el-Bahari* VI (London 1908), pl. 153; J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne* V (Paris 1969), pl. 48, fig. 371,1 (upper middle); pAnast. II 9,2; pChester Beatty XI, vs. 2,5; LRL 12, vs. 7; LRL 29,7; LRL 43,7 (bis); Urk. IV, 310,1 and probably also oWilson 10 (see J. A. Wilson in AJSL 49 [1933], 152) where only *j.ꜥš* is preserved. **Late Per.:** A. Mariette, *Denderah* IV (Paris 1880), pl. 66 (upper right above the king).

While the two instances in Naville and Vandier are accompanied by the picture of a pilot on a ship's front, in the majority of the cases a more abstract, metaphoric understanding as 'guide,' 'helper' seems preferable or necessary, which we have opted for here.

[22] In other texts *jtȝ* instead of *ṯȝj* can appear as counterpart of *jnj*.

[23] This has been demonstrated by L. Depuydt, "À propos de la notion de mouvement en copte et en égyptien," in: CdÉ 60 (1985), 89, 93, but only for cases in which these verbs follow *dj* 'to cause'.

But the rule is valid for uses without preceding *dj* as well, cf. e.g., for *ṯȝj*: LRL 32,4; Setne I 5,37 and for *jtȝ*: LES 24,8; LES

87,7. Especially conclusive are examples showing *jnj* and *ṯȝj*/*jtȝ* in contrast:

pBM 10052, 15, 12: *jnj pȝy=j jtj wꜥ bȝk, jw=f dd n=f H[. . .]n-jmn m rn, jw Pȝ-nḥsy jtȝ=f*

My father **brought** (= bought/hired) a servant whom he named H . . . enamon, and then Panehesy **took** him (away).

Setne I 4,31f.: *ꜥš Stnj r Jnj-ḥ-ḥr-rw . . . (r)-dd: m-jrj ḥrr r-ḥrj r pȝ tȝ, mtw =k sdd n mdw.(t) nb (j).jrj ḫpr n.jm =y m-bȝḥ Pr-ꜥȝ, mtw=k jnj nȝ zȝ.w . . . (32) . . . bn-pw=f ḥrr r-ḥrj r pȝ tȝ sdd=f m-bȝḥ Pr-ꜥȝ n mdw.(t) nb (j)-jrj ḫpr n Stnj, dd Pr-ꜥȝ: ṯȝj n=f nȝ zȝ.w*

Setne called to Inaros . . . : "Hurry up onto the earth, tell Pharaoh everything that happened to me, and **bring** (me) the amulets . . . !" He hurried up onto the earth and told Pharaoh everything that had happened to Setne. Pharaoh said: "**Take** the amulets to him . . . !"

This usage is exactly paralleled by the verbal pair *jyj/jwj* 'to come' and *šm* 'to go', cf. L. Depuydt, "The Semantic Structure of jw-ei 'come' and šm-bōk 'go' " in: J. P. Allen, L. Depuydt, H. J. Polotsky, D. P. Silverman, *Essays on Egyptian Grammar* (New Haven 1986), 22–30.

On the use of vectorial verbs in several European languages cf. D. Ricca, "Andare e venire nelle lingue Romanze e Germaniche: Dall' Aktionsart alla deissi," in: *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* 76 (1991), 159–92. Ricca also discusses the situation in third person narratives without any expressed locuteur, where instead the deictic origo can be placed with a main protagonist (pp. 164f.).

most preferable. Since many of the presup-
positions that the writer and the reader of the
communication shared are inaccessible to us,
we cannot be certain that this is the definite
solution. The reconstruction of what actually
happened is further hindered by the fact that
we only have the subjective viewpoint of A.

1) C told A to take something referred to with a
   plural pronoun to B (ll. 5f.). We do not know
   what exactly was brought but the items ap-
   pear to have been mentioned in the lacuna.
2) A brought these objects to B (l. 5).
3) Not necessarily connected with these events is
   an affair concerning tamarisk wood of which
   B failed to make something for A (ll. 2f.).
4) C insulted A (l. 1). It appears that C may have
   had expectations to receive certain items
   from A.
5) Because B was now under obligation to A, A
   did not take the goods from himself but re-
   trieved goods stored by B's house and took
   them to C (ll. 6–8).

6) After this had happened, B insulted A in the
   presence of the entire community (ll. 3–5).
7) C acted improperly regarding these insults;
   either he did not defend A or failed to inform
   A (l. 5).

This communication can be seen as an at-
tempt by A to restore his strained relations with
B and C but even more so a means to restore his
damaged status in the entire community. His
argumentation strategy involves justification for
his action as well as attempts to point out inap-
propriate behavior on the part of both B and C.

The present text gives an indication of how
important interpersonal relations were in the
Egyptian community. Further investigations on
documents of this type, which exist in abun-
dancy, would no doubt provide a wealth of infor-
mation on the value and function of proper
social bearing within that society.

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