

NEW KINGDOM VISITS TO THE NECROPOLIS OF DEIR EL-GEBRAWI THE CASE OF TOMB S8 (IBI)

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First defined by Helck as the “traces of their presence, which Egyptian visitors left behind them in the form of graffiti”,¹ *Besucherinschriften* were initially known for a few necropoleis only. Recent discoveries and surveys have shown on the contrary that the practice was ubiquitous,² and part of a widespread emphasis on scholarship in the New Kingdom. This “fashion” emerged alongside the general movement of cultural edition that took place at that time among the scholars and elite involved in the reinvention of the state after the Second Intermediate Period.

In 2017, we began a survey of secondary epigraphy and visitors’ inscriptions in the private necropoleis of Middle Egypt under the aegis of the IFAO and with the support of the team of Naguib Kanawati and Macquarie University. We present here our findings in tomb S8 at Deir el-Gebrawi, surveyed in 2020 with Islam el-Amir, inspector for the Ministry for Tourism and Antiquities.

THE SITE OF DEIR EL-GEBRAWI

The site of Deir el-Gebrawi in the 12th nome of Upper Egypt shelters an Old Kingdom provincial necropolis. The site includes two cliffs, northern and southern. The rock tombs in both locations date to the 6th dynasty and sheltered the local governors, who controlled in some cases both the 12th and 8th nomes of Upper Egypt and were closely connected to royal power, when the latter developed a policy of establishing networks of local agents and supports for the crown in this region.³

1 W. HELCK, “Die Bedeutung der ägyptischen Besucherinschriften”, *ZDMG* 102, 1952, pp. 39-46, particularly p. 39.

2 See e.g. H. NAVRATILOVA, *Visitors’ graffiti of dynasties 18 and 19 in Abusir and northern Saqqara. With a survey of the graffiti at Giza, Southern Saqqara, Dahshur and Maidum*, Wallasey, 2015; Chl. RAGAZZOLI, *L’épigraphie secondaire dans les tombes thébaines. Ouvrage original présenté pour l’habilitation à diriger des recherches*, Université Paris Sorbonne, 2016; Kh. HASSAN, “The visitors’ graffiti in Two Tombs of Beni Hassan (Ameny and Khnumhotep II)”, *JARCE* 52, 2016, pp. 33-54; U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti von Besuchern des Grabes N13.1 in Assiut, The Asyut Project* 15, Wiesbaden, 2020; Kh. HASSAN & Chl. RAGAZZOLI, “The survey of Secondary Epigraphy in the Private Necropoleis of Middle Egypt: The case of Meir”, dans Chl. Ragazzoli, Ch. Salvador & Kh. Hassan (eds.), *Graffiti and Rock Inscriptions from Ancient Egypt. A companion to Secondary Epigraphy*, Cairo, forthcoming (RAPH).

3 E.g. E. MARTINET, *L’administration provinciale sous l’Ancien Empire égyptien*, *PdÄ* 38.1, 2019, pp. 163-199.

The tombs were systematically excavated by Norman de G. Davies in the early 1900s⁴ and published in 1902. The Australian Centre for Egyptology, from Macquarie University, conducted further exploration, excavations and study.⁵ A consideration of the data in terms of palaeography, iconographic style, anthroponyms and phraseology led N. Kanawati to conclude a later date for the southern tombs than the northern tombs (late 6th Dynasty *versus* early 6th Dynasty).⁶ The site comprises about 120 tombs, 16 of which are decorated.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN VISITORS TO DEIR EL-GEBRAWI

Considering its date, its territorial and its social position, the necropolis of Deir el-Gebrawi is comparable to the Old Kingdom tombs of Meir, in the 14th nome of Upper Egypt, near the ancient city of Cusae. We surveyed the latter in 2017 and 2018.⁷ Yet, Meir does not display any New Kingdom visitors' inscriptions. There, epigraphic interactions with the decoration took the form of secondary captions and additions to the primary program from the entourage of the deceased and the scribes responsible for the decoration: eleven secondary captions in the tomb of Pepyankh the Black (A2), and around 17 similar captions in the main room of the tomb of Pepyankh the Middle (D2). The two tombs also include eight graffiti panels showing visitors and members of their entourage.

Such secondary captions and interaction between the direct audience and social milieu of the deceased can be seen throughout Egypt.⁸ Often overlooked and considered as belonging to one single decoration program when epigraphy is considered as part of a unique epigraphic layer, the consideration of graphic registers (styles of scripts, lay out etc)⁹ is often a good way to spot the successive sequences that form a sort of parietal stratigraphy. We suspect similar additions in Deir el-Gebrawi but the highly damaged nature of the decorated walls makes the assessment of primary and secondary layers difficult.

4 N. de G. DAVIES, *The rock tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi: Part 1: Tomb of Aba and smaller tombs of the southern group; Part 2: Tomb of Zau and tombs of the northern group*, London, 1902 (Archaeological Survey of Egypt).

5 N. KANAWATI *et al.*, *Deir el-Gebrawi. Volume 1: the northern cliff.*, Oxford, 2005; N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi, Volume II: The southern cliff. The tombs of Ibi and others*, Oxford, 2007; N. KANAWATI *et al.*, *Deir el-Gebrawi, volume III: The southern cliff. The tomb of Djau/Shemai and Djau.*, Oxford, 2013.

6 N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi I*, n. 5, pp. 16-19; N. KANAWATI & J. SWINTON, *Egypt in the Sixth Dynasty: Challenges and Responses*, Wallasey, 2018, p. 58

7 Kh. HASSAN & Chl. RAGAZZOLI, "The survey of secondary epigraphy in the private necropoleis of Middle Egypt: The case of Meir" *op. cit.*, n. 2; Chl. RAGAZZOLI & Kh. HASSAN, "Un compte hiératique de grains exposé dans la chapelle de Pépyânkh-Hénikem (A2) à Meir", in Ph. Collombert & P. Tallet (eds.), *Les archives administratives de l'Ancien Empire, Orient et Méditerranée* 37, 2021, pp. 281-296.

8 *E.g.* J. C. F. HAMILTON, "'That his perfect name may be remembered': added inscriptions in the tomb of vizier Kagemni at Saqqara", in A.-K. Gill, C. Alvarez, A. Beledanian & S. Klein (eds.), *Current research in Egyptology 2015: proceedings of the sixteenth annual symposium; University of Oxford, United Kingdom, 15-18, April 2015*, Oxford/Philadelphia, 2016, pp. 50-61; W. P. VAN PELT & N. STARING, "Interpreting graffiti in the Saqqara New Kingdom necropolis as expressions of popular customs and beliefs", *Rivista del Museo Egizio* 3, 2019; Kh. HASSAN & Chl. RAGAZZOLI, "The survey of secondary epigraphy in the private necropoleis of Middle Egypt: The case of Meir", *op. cit.* n. 2

9 On the definition of graphic registers, see Chl. RAGAZZOLI & Fl. ALBERT, "Registre graphique", in *Abécédaire des Mondes lettrés (en ligne)*, 2021.

Yet, Deir el-Gebrawi obviously shared with Beni Hassan and Assiut tombs their status of visiting places for scribes of the 18th dynasty with Beni Hassan and Assiut tombs. The secondary epigraphy in Ibi's tomb is the clearest example of this in Deir el-Gebrawi.

IBI'S TOMB (S8)

We present here the graffiti—typical visitors' inscriptions—of South tomb n° 8 (S8), belonging to Ibi¹⁰ (figs. 1-2).

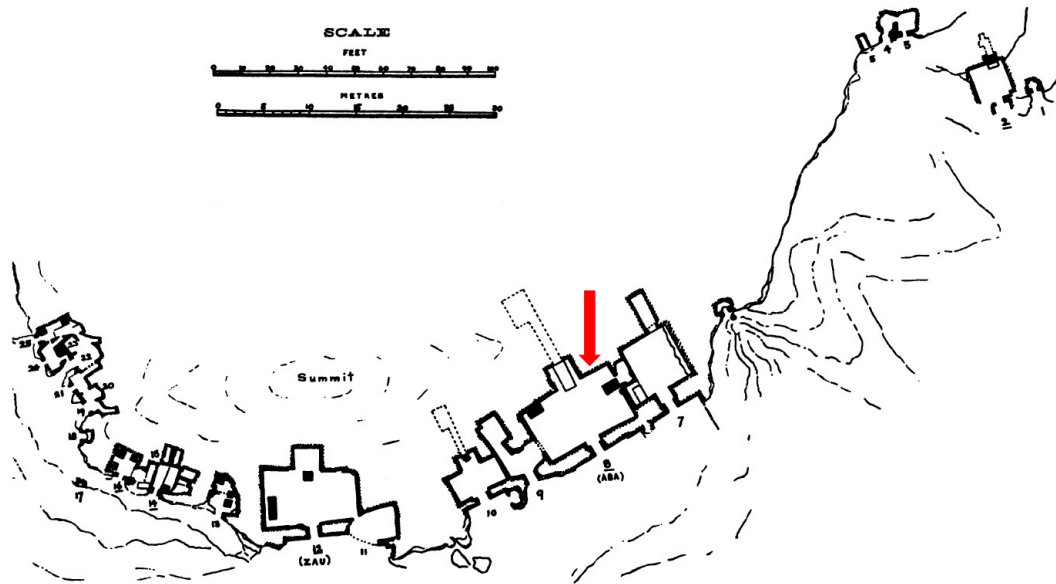


Figure 1. The Tomb of Ibi and the other southern group [N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el-Gebrâwi* I, 1902, pl. 1].

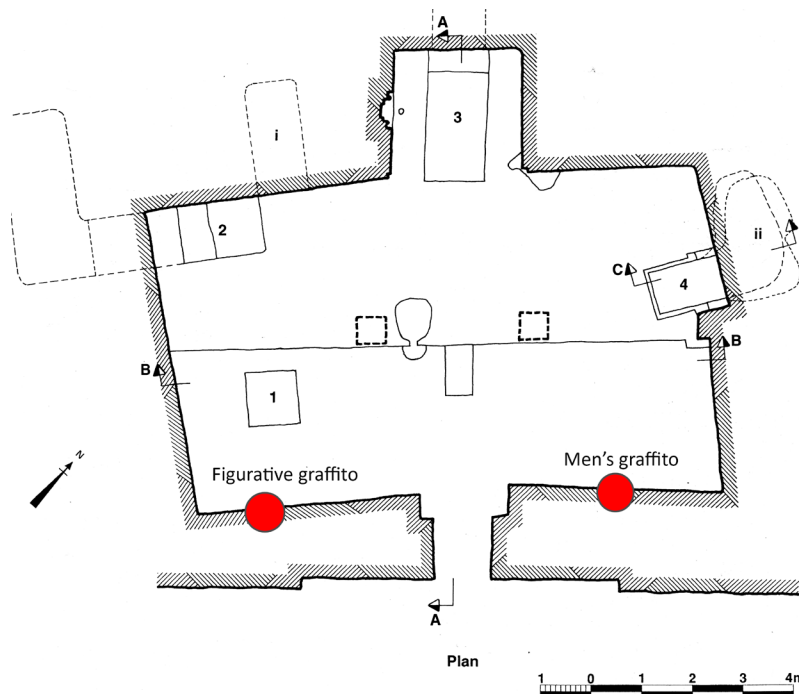


Figure 2. Position of the graffiti in S2 [plan after N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi* II, 2007, pl. 41].

10 B. PORTER & R.L.B. MOSS, *Topographical bibliography of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs, and paintings*, vol. IV: *Lower and Middle Egypt*, Oxford, 2004, p. 246; N. de G. DAVIES, *The rock tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi* I, n. 4, pp. 8-24, pl. 1-21; N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi* II, n. 5.

This tomb belonged to the dignitary called Ibi, whose very long protocol is displayed on the walls. His main titles were *hereditary prince* (*jry-p t*), *governor* (*h3ty- ʿ*), *chancellor of the King of Lower Egypt* (*htmty bjt*), *sole companion* (*smr w t(y)*), *great chief of the nome of This* (*hry-tp ʿ3 T3-wr*), *overseer of the South* (*(j)m(y)-r(3) Šm ʿ*), *he who belongs to Nekhen* (*jry-Nhn*), *chief of Nekheb* (*hry-tp Nhb*), *great chief of the Dweſ nome* (*hry tp ʿ3 Dw.f*); *chief lector priest* (*hry-tp hr-hb*), *overseer of the Dual Granary* (*(j)m(y)-r(3) šnwty*), *overseer of the Dual Treasury* (*(j)m(y)-r(3) prwy-hd*).¹¹ Ritual titles also link him with the monarchic cult.

Ibi shows the typical curriculum of an influential local dignitary with a high standing at court and in central administration. He grew up under Pepy I, was appointed as nomarch at Deir el-Gebrawi during the reign of Merenre and died under Pepy II as an overseer of Upper Egypt and presumably nomarch of Abydos.¹² This makes him an official of great significance linked to the royal in-laws from Abydos.¹³ He held offices in Memphis and central state, and he had strong connections to the king:¹⁴ “the evidence therefore suggests that *Jbj* enjoyed a position and privileges far above those of other nomarchs. In addition, he and his descendants were the only nomarchs throughout the Sixth Dynasty who were responsible for governing two provinces”.¹⁵ This social and political standing is reflected by his tomb and its situation in the local landscape on the southern cliff in Deir el-Gebrawi. The tomb is indeed “the largest and most complex of the nine decorated tombs” of the cliff, and “close to the summit of the mountain and facing southeast”, it is “approached by a broad, flat area forming a type of forecourt”.¹⁶ The monumental façade seems to have been left undecorated, but sides of the entrance doorway were adorned by figures of Ibi and his wife.¹⁷

The chapel – the “public” part of the tomb accessible to visitors – consists of a rectangular chamber with a large recess for offerings in the back wall (symbolic west). The geographic orientation is South-East towards North-West (the symbolic West is the north-west wall and the symbolic East the south-east one). The walls of the tomb were covered with a layer of stucco, the upper part of which is decorated, while the ceiling is very rough and has not been flattened throughout the tomb.

11 N. de G. DAVIES, *The rock tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi* J, n. 4, p. 8

12 N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi* II, *op. cit.*, n. 5, p. 19; see N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi* I, pp. 28-29. For the sources and monuments of Ibi, see É. MARTINET, *L'administration provinciale, op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 908-913.

13 N. KANAWATI, *ibidem*.

14 N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi* II, pp. 20-21.

15 N. KANAWATI, *Deir el-Gebrawi* II, p. 22.

16 *Ibidem*.

17 N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi* I, p. 4.

GRAFFITO OF MEN

A large visitors' inscription is still readable, although substantially erased. It was inscribed on the entrance wall, on the left of the doorway. The wall is orientated towards the South East but it corresponds to the symbolic East and opens to the Nile Valley. The panel, which was much less damaged at the beginning of the 20th century than it is now, depicts a fishing scene with the deceased spearing two large animals, accompanied by his family. A column of hieroglyphs on the left gives the title of the scene: *m33 k3t sht h3m mh(t)t stj*, "watching the works of the countryside, catching fish and throwing the spear". The graffito was inked in the space left blank under the elbow of Ibi (fig. 3). Although the text is now mainly erased, it stood at eye-level and at a focal point.

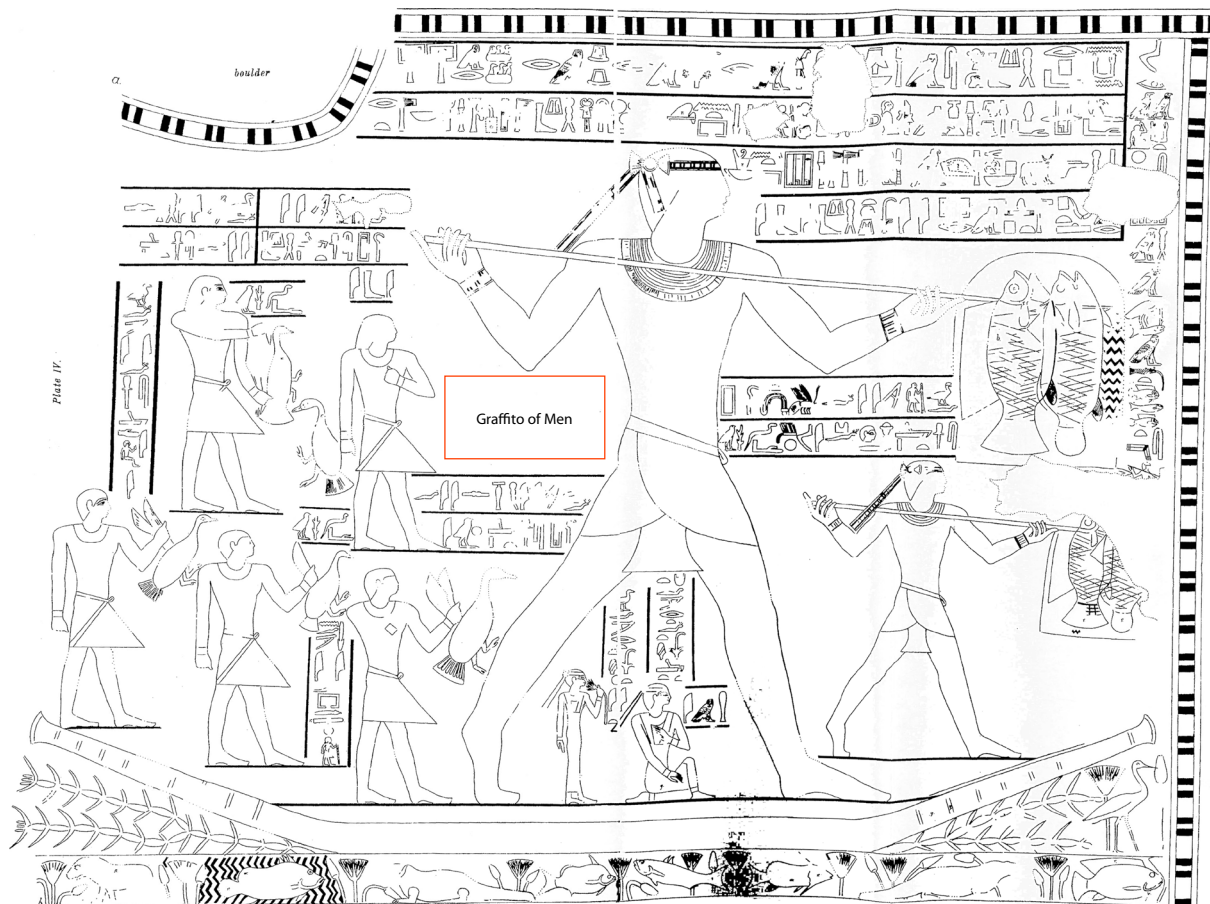


Figure 3. Position of Men's visitors' inscription [after N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi* I, 1902, pl. II].

The graffito is 40 cm wide and 16 cm high and consists of 11 lines of literary hieratic traced in ink. It is mainly erased but some remaining elements give crucial information. We give here the preliminary results of our examinations (fig. 4).



Figure 4a. Photograph of the graffito of Men [the authors].

a

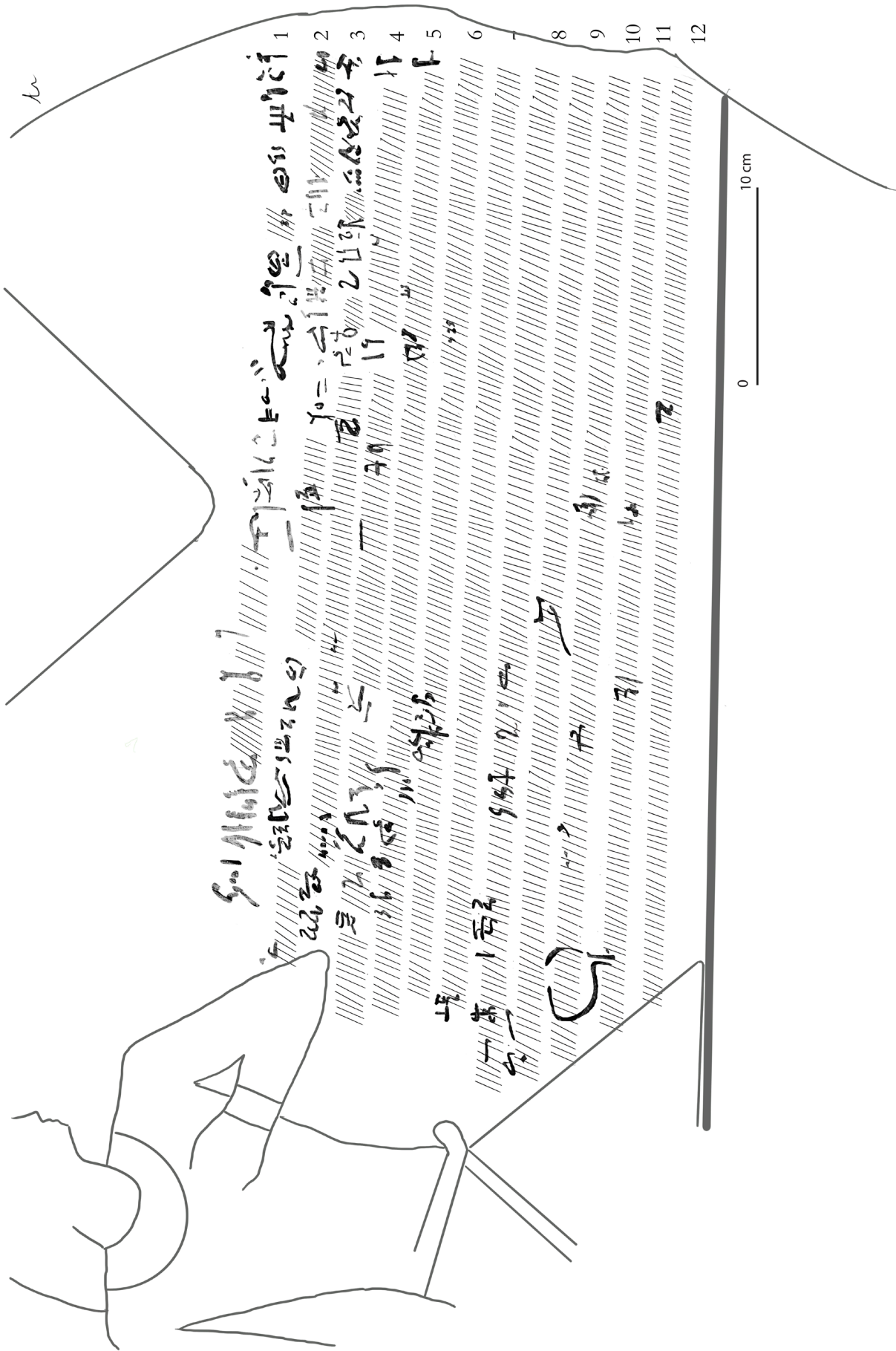








Figure 4b. Fac-simile of the graffito of Men [the authors].

- (1) *h3t-sp 16 (?) 3bd 2 šmw [sw ...] hr hm n(y) [Nswt]-Bjty Nb-m3 't-R s3 R ' Jmn[-htp...] hq3-
W3st ['nh dt] nhh mr jt.f*
- (2) *[...] js [....] Pth gm~n.f mj [....] hr jwt pw jr~n sš Mn [...]*
- (3) *nb [...] jnw k3w [...] nfr [...] m33*
- (4) *js [....] k3 [...shn....] m3' [...] m sšw [...] rn.f*
- (5) *jy (?) [...nb... nfrw ... h3 ...]*
- (6) *[... h3 m...]*
- (7) *[...]*
- (8) *[... sw ...n ... hpr...]*
- (9) *[... d.f ...]*
- (10) *[... nb ...]*
- (11) *[... mdw ...]*
- (12) *[...]*

- (1) “Regnal year 16 (?), second month of *shemu*, [day...] under the person of the King of [Upper] and Lower Egypt Neb-maât-râ, the son of Râ Amen[hotep l.p.h.] Heqawaset [who may live forever] and ever, beloved of his father
- (2) [...] tomb [...] Ptah, he found (it) like [...]. And this was a visit made by scribe Men [...]
- (3) [...] tributes, offerings [...] perfect [...] to see
- (4) the tomb [...] true [...] in the writings [...] his/its name
- (5) coming [.... a thousand of ...]
- (6) [... a thousand of [...]
- (7) [...]
- (8) [...]
- (9) [...so he may cause...]
- (10) [...]
- (11) [...]
- (12) [...].”






Notes

(line 1)

It is possible to hesitate on the reading of the regnal year. We have identified the first sign  as ,¹⁰ (see MEGALLY, *Considérations sur les variations*, 1971, pl. XXIV, d). As for , we read as 6, cf. , ,  (ibid., pl. XXIII, g-h).

S3-R 'Jmn-*h*tp: missing cartouche opening sign after *s3-R* ' ; the same feature is noted in the Assiut graffito TN41 from the tomb of Iti-ibi(-iqer), an inscription that is likely to have been written by the same scribe as this one (Verhoeven *Dipinti*, 2020, p. 85, pl. 224, l. 1).

(line 2)

Sš Mn, , , is the signatory of the graffito. The first group of the name is written in the abbreviated form attested in many 18th dynasty examples: , ,  (cf. MÖLLER, *Hieratische Paläographie I*, 540; MEGALLY, *Considérations sur les variations*, pl. XX, e.). But this ligature is not used in the writings of the name Men in the Assiut graffiti, except possibly in one witness of the name in graffito TN30, cf. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, p. 72f., 271f., pl. 212.

(line 10)

The two long strokes at the end of the line could correspond to the opening and closure of a cartouche.

A VISIT BY SCRIBE MEN ()

Although the graffito suffered substantial erosion of the text, the remaining elements give crucial and exceptional information. One is the mention of a date, whereas most visitors' inscriptions remain undated. Extremely rare in the Theban corpus, dates occur several times in the Memphite corpus,¹⁸ and in the tomb of Iti-ibi(-iqer) in Assiut.¹⁹

A scribe *Men* is well attested in the neighboring necropolis of Gebel Assiut al-gharbi, through more than 24 hieratic dipinti in the tomb of Iti-ibi(-iqer).²⁰ He marked this space with a number of signatures but also displayed his scholarship with copies of large excerpts of known literary works such as *The Teaching of Khety to his son Pepy*, and *The Teaching of Amenemhat*. He but showed his wit and mastery of scribal fashion and habits with a number of visitors' texts and a satirical-erotic inscription.²¹

18 H. NAVRATILOVA, *Visitors' graffiti, op. cit.*, 2015.

19 U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, pp. 217-220.

20 U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, pp. 268-272, where she shows that the texts offer three different palaeographical types, for what reason the scribe, or the scriptor, is maybe not always the same person.

21 U. VERHOEVEN, "Die wie Kraniche balzen. Männerphantasien zur Zeit Amenhoteps III. in Assiut", in D. Kessler, R. Schulz, M. Ullmann, A. Verbovsek & S. Wimmer (eds), *Texte – Theben – Tonfragmente, ÄAT 76*, 2009, 434-441; U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, pp. 232-233.

He signed most of these graffiti as *scribe Men* (*sš mn*), the title of *sš* used alone is a mark of scholarly and learned status,²² which he displayed in his epigraphic contribution to the space of the tomb. Yet, in some instances, his filiation was recorded, as *son of the wâb-priest Wepwawet Wepwaweti, born of the lady of the house Nut* (*s3 w 'b Wp-w3wt Wp-w3wtj, ms-n nbt-pr Nwt*), and he has a *brother Dwa* (*sn=fDw3w*).²³ The association with Wepwawet suggests a local character.

Untypically for visitors' inscriptions, the Men from Assiut included dates in three of his graffiti: year 2 in visitors' inscription TN18; year 1/2 of Amenhotep III in TN41 and year 30 of the same king in TN42²⁴ (fig. 5).

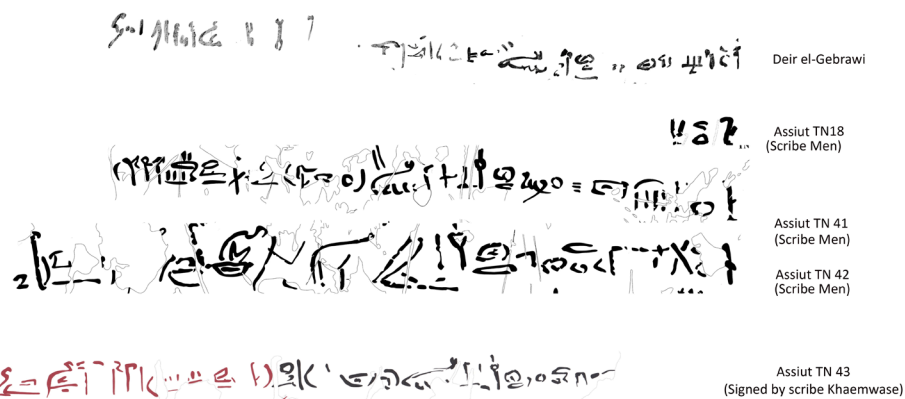


Figure 5. The dates in Men's and Khaemwase's graffiti from Deir el-Gebrawi and Assiut (TN8, TN41, TN42 and TN43) [after U. VERHOVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, pl. 197, 224].

Our inscription is too fragmentary and erased for us to be able to offer a secure palaeographic comparison and it must be noted that no definitive closeness can be established, especially in the style used to draw the name *Mn*. Yet, one cannot exclude – without being able to verify it – the hypothesis that the prolific scribe Men of the time of Amenhotep III who regularly visited the tomb N13.1 in Assiut visited other local necropoleis, including Deir el-Gebrawi.

A FIGURATIVE GRAFFITO

A second graffiti, figurative this time, is to be found in a similar point on the other side of the door. While the left side of the entrance wall showed a fishing scene, the right side is occupied by a fowling scene taking place in a marshland landscape (fig. 6).

In this scene typical of Old Kingdom funerary décor,²⁵ Ibi is the main character, occupying the middle of the scene standing over the boat wearing a short kilt, holding a throw-stick in one of his hands. He is accompanied by his family. Just behind the deceased, at eye level and in a focal point similar to the one of Men's textual graffiti, stands a figurative graffiti, in red ink (fig. 7).

22 Chl. RAGAZZOLI, "The Social creation of a scribal place. The visitor's inscriptions in the tomb of Antefiqer (TT60) (With newly recorded graffiti)", *SAK* 42, 2013, pp. 276-277.

23 U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, pp. 268-269.

24 U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, 2020, p. 269.

25 N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi I, op. cit.*, p. 13.

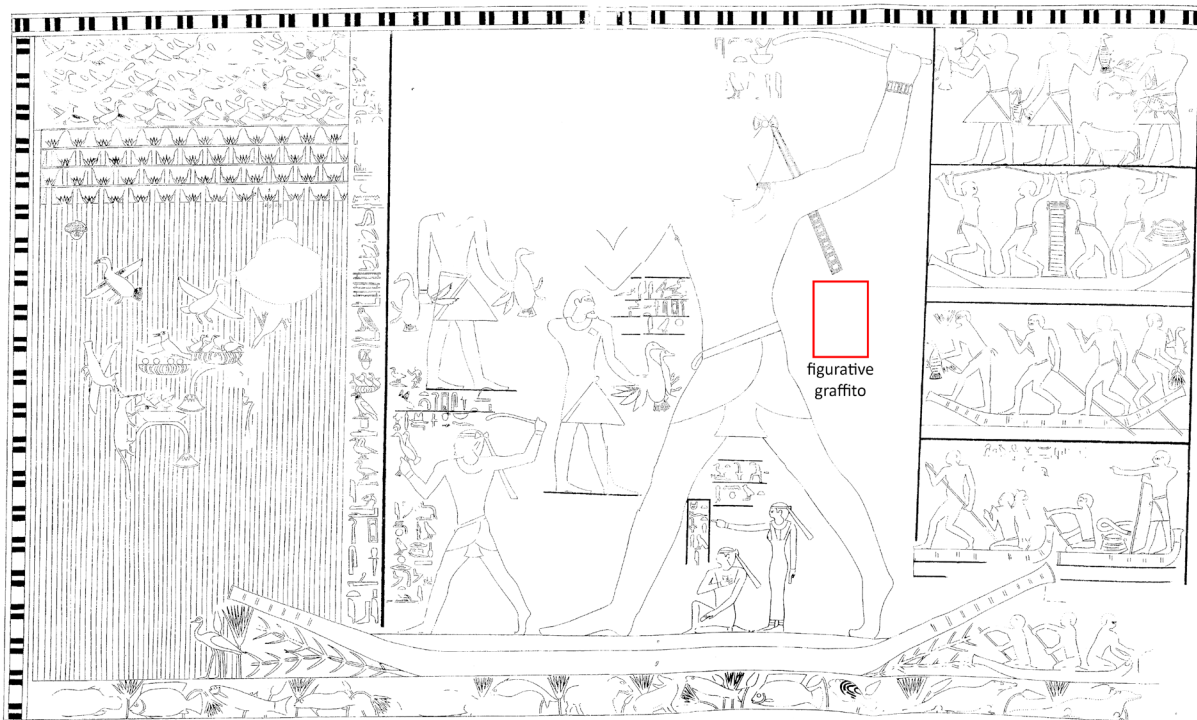


Figure 6. Position of the figurative graffito on the rear wall, right side of the entrance
 [after N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el-Gebrâwi* I, 1902, pl. V].

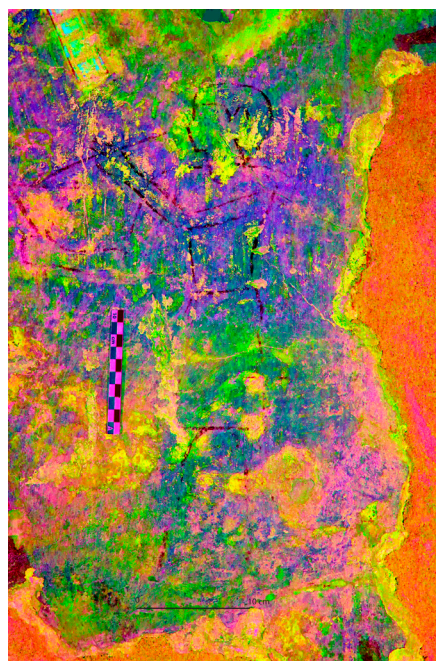


Figure 7. Photographs (natural light and D-stretch filter) and facsimile of graffito 2
 [the authors].

Such a figure is shown directly on the righthand side in a procession scene (fig. 8):

On the opposite wall, the focal wall, the deceased himself is preceded by a similar figure (fig. 9).

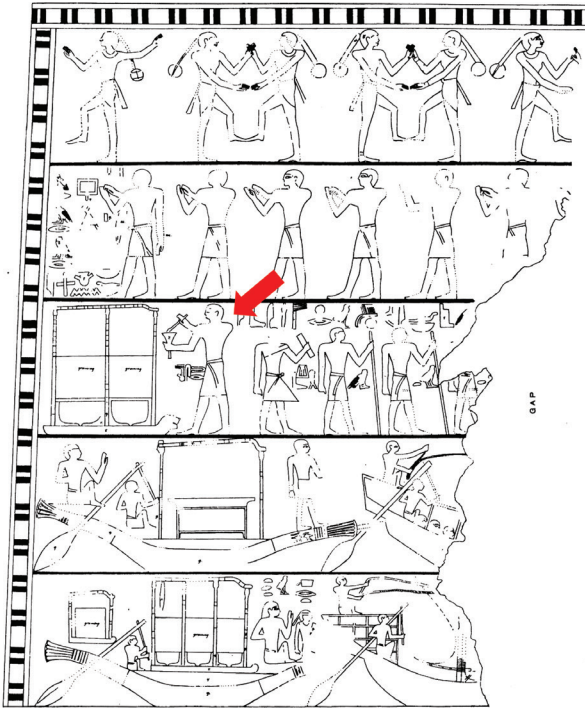


Figure 8. Virtual South wall, left section
[after N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi I*, 1902, pl. X].

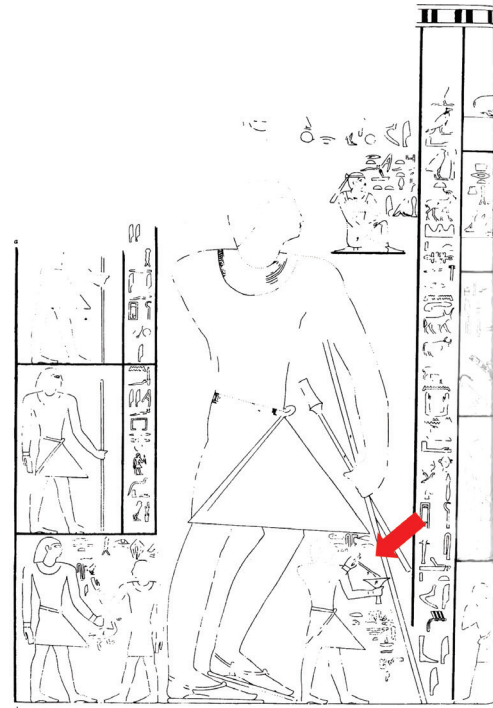


Figure 9. Virtual South wall, left section
[after N. de G. DAVIES, *Deir el Gebrâwi I*, 1902, pl. IX].

The image drawn by the visitor acts as a reflection on and dialogue with the adjacent walls. It shows how the scribe interpreted the tomb and his will to add to the decoration by this addition, which works here as a votive testimonial, the epigraphic equivalent of burning incense. Such “votive” epigraphic additions are also found in the corpus of visitors’ inscriptions from the early New Kingdom. Yet, unlike here, those votive representations usually depict the visitor with his hands raised in an attitude of laudition (fig. 10).

The much-graffitied tomb of Antefiqer in Thebes (TT 60) also shows the copy of a dog from the decoration in a similar red-lined drawing.²⁶ Another graffito of TT 60 is signed by Scribe Amenemhat, owner of TT 82, who copied motives from Antefiqer’s tomb for the tombs whose construction he supervised.²⁷ Such examples show the association between scribal visitors’ inscriptions and search and compilations of models from the past. Similar remarks can be made about the visitors’ inscriptions in Memphis.²⁸

26 Chl. RAGAZZOLI, “The social creation”, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 295, N8.

27 N. de G. DAVIES, *The Tomb of Antefoker, Vizier of Sesostri I, and of His Wife Senet (No. 60)*, London, 1920, pp. XXXVII-XXXVIIIa, p. 29, no 33; A. DEN DONKER, “Prélude à une étude de la réception de l’image égyptienne par les Anciens Égyptiens”, in E. Warembo & V. Angenot (eds.), *Thèbes aux 101 portes. Mélanges à la mémoire de Roland Tefnin*, *MonAeg* 12, 2010, pp. 79-90; RAGAZZOLI, “The Creation of a social place”, *op. cit.* 2013, p. 313.

28 H. NAVRATILOVA, “Visitors’ inscriptions in the Memphite pyramid complexes of Ancient Egypt (c. 1543-1292 BC)”, in Chl. Ragazzoli *et al.* (eds), *Scribbling through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity*, London, 2018, pp. 137-138.

In Assiut, scribe Men signed several drawings, none of them being votive. His lions (TN29/ZN5; TN30/ZN6; TS23/ZS6), gazelle (TS5/ZS2), and hippopotamus (TS33/ZN13) seemed to belong to the register of the scribal games rather than votive testimonials or copies, but he was surely inspired by motives in the original decoration²⁹. It shows how the graffiti belong to the same scribal repertoire as the one that can be found on ostraca in the New Kingdom for example. Nevertheless, several graffiti left in Assiut tomb N13 witness that the visitors were aware both of the decoration and of the historic past it belonged to.³⁰



MMA504.O.2.3³⁴

Figure 10. Votive drawings from the corpus of visitors' inscriptions in Theban tombs [the authors].

29 E. GERVERS, in: Verhoeven, *Dipinti*, 2020, p. 347f.

30 U. VERHOEVEN, *Dipinti*, *op. cit.*, 2021, pp. 287-288; pp. 295-300.

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These scribal graffiti from Deir el-Gebrawi tombs in general and Ibi's in particular are further examples of the general interest of 18th Dynasty scholars in monuments of the past, throughout Egypt. The concomitance of a long visitor inscription and a perfectly understood copy of an iconographic motif testifies to the reception of the decorative program of the tomb by these visitors, whose visit must have been motivated in part by an antiquarian interest and the search for models of the past. It also demonstrates a community of practice in different scribal communities across the country. Along with the visitors' graffiti from Assiut and Beni Hassan, this evidence from Deir el-Gebrawi shows that local scholars had interest for the local monuments from the distant past, as well as it was the case in necropoleis of the capital cities such as Memphis or Thebes.

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DAVIES N. de G., *The Tomb of Antefoker, Vizier of Sesostris I, and of His Wife Senet (No. 60)*, London, 1920.

31 Graffito on the door lintel of TT60, Chl. RAGAZZOLI, "The social creation of a scribal place. The visitors' inscriptions in the tomb of Antefiqer (TT60) (With newly recorded graffiti)", *SAK* 42, 2013, esp. p. 293 (E1).

32 Graffito on the door lintel of TT60, Chl. RAGAZZOLI, "The social creation...", 2013, pp. 295-296 (N10).

33 Graffito on the north wall of the corridor of TT60, Chl. RAGAZZOLI, "The social creation...", 2013, pp. 307-308.

34 Graffito in the unfinished tomb MMA504, Chl. RAGAZZOLI, *La grotte des scribes à Deir el-Bahari. La tombe MMA 504 et ses graffiti*, Cairo, 2017, p. 180.

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