Two Papyrus Fragments with Historically Relevant Data

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This small article is a foretaste of the richness in historical data provided by the thousands of papyrus fragments contained in the archives from the ancient workmen’s community of Deir el-Medina now gradually consultable in the online database TPOP.

Thanks to the unfailing diligence of the curator of the papyrus collection in the Museo Egizio, Susanne Töpfer, and her team of collaborators, the almost Herculean work of creating an online database of the dozens of hieratic papyri and the thousands of fragments has made considerable progress. The subsequent work of transcription and searching for joins and/or fragments belonging to the same original document is meanwhile in full swing. Publications of several documents have already seen the light, and more are in various stages of preparation. Many fragments will hopefully end up in publications of complete documents, but on account of their text passages with historically relevant information the versos of two fragments deserve preliminary advance publication.

CP29/035 = Cat.2105/360 verso

The recto of this fragment (Fig. 1) bears six incomplete lines of a list of commodities, most likely dating to the mid-20th Dynasty. The passage I am concerned with here is on the verso (Fig. 2).
Translation

(x+1) of the two scribes of the river-[bank ...
(x+2) retainer Userhatmose, retainer [...
(x+3) This day: giving the remainder [...
(x+4) Regnal Year 4 Month III [...]
(x+5) Entered (for) the left side from [...] 
(x+6) Regnal Year 1 Month IV of Ax.t [...

Commentary

(1) The two scribes are most likely members of the team of four ḫnw-agents of the riverbank mentioned in O. Ashmolean Museum HO 53, rt. 3 (Cerny-Gardiner, Hieratic Ostraca, 1957, pl. XLIX, 1).
(2) A retainer Userhatmose is not known from other sources.

The importance of the text on this fragment lies in lines 4 and 6. The few incomplete lines doubtlessly present fragmentary journal notes, in view of the paleography dating to the second half of the 20th Dynasty. The dates in lines 4 and 6 indicate a change in a monarch’s reign between a Regnal Year 4 Month III of ḫ.t and a Regnal Year 1 Month IV of ḫ.t. The only king in the second half of the 20th Dynasty who reigned for a brief period was Ramesses X. So far, this king was thought to have reigned for 3 years, based on the evidence of the so-called “Giornale” of Year 3. The last date mentioned in this journal text is Year 3 Month II of ḫ.t, Day 2 (recto 7, 27), or Month IV of ḫ.t, Day 24. Based on the text of the fragment under discussion, his reign continued after Year 3 Month II of ḫ.t for more than a year, until sometime between Month III and Month IV of ḫ.t of Year 4. The accession date of Ramesses X fell on I pr.t 27. Consequently, his reign lasted almost 10 months into his fourth regnal year. The last date of the reign of Ramesses X coincides with the accession date of his successor Ramesses XI and therefore lies in the same period between Month III ḫ.t and Month IV ḫ.t. This then contradicts the proposed date of the latter king’s accession, namely III Ḡtw Day 20. This date has been accepted by most authors until recently. Yet, the sources to support this suggested date can hardly be called decisive. The two key documents quoted are P. Turin Cat. 1888 + Cat. 2095 and P. Ashmolean Museum 1945.96, the Adoption Papyrus. The first is a journal text from the reign of Ramesses XI containing a series of dates spread over several months, with only one full date: Year 18 IV Ḡtw Day 14 or 24. Considering this as certain indication of a recent year change is speculation and beyond proof. The
The second document is the famous Adoption Papyrus, P. Ashmolean Museum 1945.96. In the words of its first editor, Alan Gardiner, the opening lines of this document record, on III šmwt Day 20, a visit by Ramesses XI to the Temple of Karnak to announce his accession to the god Amun, followed by an offering to this deity.7 The text clearly only speaks of informing the god Amun of the accession of the king – sr.t htr n nfr pn šps n šmn.8 Contrary to the opinion of the scholars who first posited III šmwt Day 20 as the coronation date, the accession of the king did not take place on that day at Karnak. This ceremony certainly had already taken place earlier either in the Delta residence or at Memphis, and as usual the king later had to pay visits to other state gods to inform them of his accession. A third source supporting an accession date on III šmwt 20 was allegedly found in P. Turin Cat. 2097/297 + Cat. 2105/376, verso.9 This small fragment of a journal text most probably from the reign of Ramesses X or Ramesses XI only contains a few dates in the šmwt season of a Year 2. There is no indication of a change in regnal year at all, and this also holds for a similar unpublished journal text on P. Turin CP21/004 containing dates in the same Year 2.

CP37/092 verso
https://papyri.museoegizio.it/o/474257

The recto of this fragment (Fig. 3) bears six incomplete lines of a journal text dating to the second half of the 20th Dynasty. Again, the text we are concerned with here is on the verso (Fig. 4).

Transcription

Transliteration

(x+1) [rnp. šps 15 [sbd 1 šh.t] sw 10 (+h…)]
(x+2) try n rš-wmlm […]
(x+3) gšr t Imnt.t […]
(x+4) rnp-t-sp 15, sbd 1 šh.t sw 18 […]
(x+5) […] nswt Hr-m-hb […]
(x+6) […] dl.t diw […]

Fig. 3: CP37/092 = Cat. 2105/360, recto. Scan by Museo Egizio.

Fig. 4: CP37/092 = Cat. 2105/360, verso. Scan by Museo Egizio.
Translation

(x+1) [Reg]nal Year 15, [Month I of šh.t], Day 10
(+ x ...]
(x+2) food basket [...]  
(x+3) crossing to the West by [...]  
(x+4) Regnal Year 15, Month I of šh.t, Day 18 [...]  
(x+5) [...] King Horemheb [...]  
(x+6) [...] distributing grain rations [...]  

Commentary

This fragment bears six incomplete lines of a journal text from Regnal Year 15 of Ramesses IX. The incomplete state of the fragment slightly hampers a definite reconstruction of the event recorded in lines 4 and 5, but parallel records in other journal texts may help to offer a solution. Notably, during the 20th Dynasty the anniversaries of both the accession to the throne and the date of death of several deified or venerated monarchs were observed in the community of Deir el-Medina. Among these first and foremost are the founder patrons of the village, Amenhotep I and his mother Ahmose-Nefertari, followed by Sethi I, Ramesses II and Ramesses III. In the journal texts these events are usually noted in similar terms: h¢ – “accession of king NN”, or ḫnw n – “sailing of king NN”, sometimes preceded by a standard formula like wsf n ts is.t – “the gang was idle”, or bskw – “working”. A few examples will illustrate this style of recording such events.

The accession of Ramesses II:

P. Turin Cat.1898 + Cat.1937 + Cat.2094/244, rt. I, 5: II šh.t 6 wsf ḫnw Wsr-mšr.t-R½-Sstp-n-R¢.17

One event recorded in a journal text but not yet noticed in this respect is: P. Turin Cat. 1898 + Cat. 1937 + Cat. 2094/244, rt. 5,10: III šmw 22 ḫš Hr-m-ḥb.18

The spelling of the word ḫš with the determinative D1 looks suspicious. This D1 is most likely a mistake for P1, the determinative of the verb ḫš, “to cross”. “Crossing” may well be an earlier version for the term ḫnw – “sailing” later used to indicate the date of death of a monarch. If so, we would have here a dated note observing the day of death of king Horemheb on III šmw 22. This finding allows for a possible reconstruction of the dated note in lines 4-5 of the journal fragment under discussion as: “Regnal Year 15, I šh.t 18. Observing the accession day of King Horemheb”.

The death of Sethi I:

O. Ashmolean Museum HO 11, vs. 7: III šmw 24 ḫš ḫnw Ṣḥḥy.15

The death of Ramesses II:

O. Cairo 25503, vs. 4: [III šmw 24 ḫš.n tš] is.t m wsf n ḫnw Ṣḥḥ.16

The accession of Ramesses III:

P. Turin CP21/004 (unpub.), rt. 3: III šmw 27 bskw ḫš n nswt [...].

The accession of Ramesses III:

P. Turin Cat.1898 + Cat.1937 + Cat.2094/244, rt. 2,26: I šmw 26 ḫš n nswt Wsr-mšr.t-R¢-Sstp-n- [...].14
Notes
1 For this project, see Töpfer, RiME 2 (2018).
2 For journal notes, see the lemma “Journal of the Necropolis” in: Davies, Life Within the Five Walls, 2018, pp. 162–164, and Van der Moezel, Administrative Hieratic from Dynasties 19 and 20, 2022, pp. 25–27.
3 Botti-Peet, Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe, 1928, pl. 55 and pl. 55 text d.
6 For journal notes, see the lemma “Journal of the Necropolis” in: Davies, Life Within the Five Walls, 2018, pp. 162–164, and Van der Moezel, Administrative Hieratic from Dynasties 19 and 20, 2022, pp. 25–27.
7 Botti-Peet, Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe, 1928, pl. 55 and pl. 55 text d.
9 Ohlhafer, GM 135, 1993, p. 60 (the document is there cited as p’Turin 2097/161+2105 vso). Since the death of Sethi I thus fell on III Shemu 20 is incorrect.
12 Botti-Peet, Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe, 1928, pl. 53.
13 Černý, Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non-littéraires, 1935, pl. 45.
14 Botti-Peet, Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe, 1928, pl. 53.
15 Černý-Gardiner, Hieratic Ostraca, 1957, pl. XXV, 2. Contrary to the idea of Jauhiainen, “Do Not Celebrate Your Feast Without Your Neighbours”, 2009, p. 179, the Hnw – “sailing” does not refer to the accession of a king but to his death; see the text quoted below with note 15. Since the death of Sethi I thus fell on III Shemu 24, it is noteworthy that his son and successor Ramesses II ascended to the throne three days later, on III Shemu 27.
16 Černý, Ostraca hiératiques, 1930, pp. 1–2, pl. 1*.
18 Botti-Peet, Il Giornale della Necropoli di Tebe, 1928, pl. 58.

Bibliography
Černý, J., Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el Médîneh. [Tome I] (nos 1 à 113) (DFIFAO 3), Le Caire 1935.