

Inscription in the Dakhla region

Text, translation and comments

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The inscription has been analysed on the basis of the following documents:

1. Photographs by W. Lama;
2. Photographs by R. Kuper;
3. Two tracings by B. Kuper.

Photographs have been taken at different times and under different lights so that they complete each other and make the inscription readable. One of the tracings depicts the outline, the other one the whole surface.

Size

Width ca. 76 cm, height ca. 12 cm. The writing is sharp and fairly deeply carved into sandstone.

Hieroglyphic transcription



Fig. 1. Map of the area with approximate position of the inscription.



Commentary on the transcription

First line

1. There is no doubt about the reading \hat{n} as it appears evident from B. Kuper's tracing and R. Kuper's photograph. In both cases the stroke above the sign standing for «10» is clearly visible.

2. The *r* signs in *prr* show differences especially in the copy, but also in the photographs. The reading is not however in doubt. A possible writing $\overline{\text{r}}$, on grammatical grounds, i.e. an infinitive form, is certainly not to be taken into account, if a comparison is made with the writing of *t* in *rup.t-sp*, in the first line, and in *wh3.tjw*, in the second line.

Second line

1. The reading nw in *nwd* is certain, even if particularly the tracing but also the photograph by R. Kuper show a discrepancy. In the photograph by W. Lama the blade of the adze pointing down to the right is very clearly legible.

2. The reading nw in *nwd* is not entirely clear in the writing, on the other hand there is no other possibility apart from *nwd*. A shadow in W. Lama's photograph shows there is a small indentation in the surface of the rock here. Apart from this, the inaccuracy of execution can be held responsible for the unusual writing, that looks like the writing of the sign nw .

3. The writing of *wh3.tjw* «oasis dwellers» is remarkable: firstly because of the signs wh in the word, secondly for the unusual sequence of the determinatives. However, there is no possibility other than the reading wh3.tjw ; wh3.tjw is totally unlikely, as according to the palaeo-

graphic study (see *infra*) there is no evidence of the sign wh occurring neither in the Old nor in the Middle Kingdom. See also hereunder in the section on dating.

Translation

1. In the year 23 of the Kingdom: the steward *Mrj* is on his way

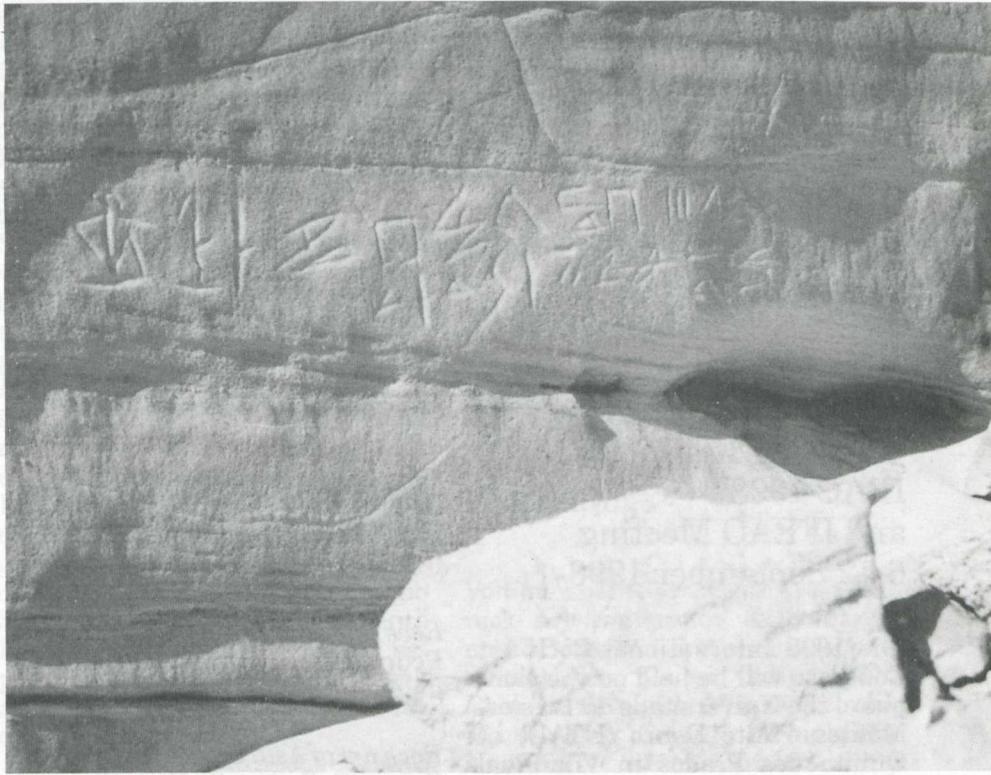
2. to meet the oasis dwellers

Dating

To date this brief inscription without further information, either topographic or prosopographic, and without any further support is difficult and highly doubtful. In fact, the classical construction of the Middle Egyptian with the emphatic *sdm=f* in *prr* virtually excludes on its own (i.e. before the palaeographic study) a later date.

Taking into account our knowledge of historical evolution, we are left with a possible datation in the late Old Kingdom and in the Middle Kingdom. Late OK, above all the Sixth Dynasty, was a time of prosperity in Dakhla, as also the results of the IFAO excavations at Balat show. A dating in the times of Pepi II would therefore be highly plausible. From personal information given to me by R. Kuper on the context, that is to say on the other rock engravings in this site, a date in the Sixth Dynasty is more likely than a later date. The fact that the relatively high year 23 is mentioned bars out one of the intermediate periods and equally points to the OK/MK. Taking into consideration the long reigns of most kings of Dynasty XII, the year 23 points particularly, though not exclusively, to the MK.

Fig. 2. The inscription. (Photo W. Lama).



A comparison of the writings of the single signs with the occurrences during the OK and the MK suggests in any case the following results.

First line

𓆎: This writing is found according to GOEDICKE (1988: 70) since the Papyrus of Heqanachte, that is to say since the end of the Eleventh Dynasty; MÖLLER (1909, Nr. 624) quotes its first occurrence during the Twelfth Dynasty.

𓆏: The ligature occurs according to MÖLLER (1909, Nr X) since the time of the Hatnub inscriptions, that is to say Dynasty X/XI. According to EDEL (1980: 114-115) it already occurs in the second half of Dynasty VI.

Second line

𓆑: According to GOEDICKE (1988: 39) this writing possibly already occurs in the Sixth Dynasty, but was certainly used at the time of the Papyrus of Heqanachte.

𓆒: The writing of the sign *w* with the coil of rope occurs, according to MÖLLER (1909, Nr 200B), from the Tenth/Eleventh Dynasty onward. GOEDICKE (1988: 17) quotes only one case from Hatnub.

𓆓: In this form the sign according to MÖLLER (1909, Nr 192B), EDEL (1980, 26-27) and GOEDICKE (1988: 14) appears for the first time in the Eleventh/Twelfth Dynasty.

From the palaeographic study a datation in the Middle Kingdom, possibly in the Twelfth Dynasty, can be overall inferred, rather than in the Old Kingdom, during the (late) Sixth Dynasty. As above, this result must be regarded with caution, or in any case with some degree of uncertainty.

The prosopographic clues that sometimes can help establish a date unfortunately do not help in making more progress in this case. The name *Mrj* in this form, that is to say with 𓆑 rather than with 𓆒 is found only one time in the Middle Kingdom, and as a female name, while the sequence without these signs 𓆑𓆒 is more frequent in the OK and in the MK (cfr. Ranke

1935, 159.23 and 159.21;22). The person who is here named *Mrj* is however not known as an individual.

Conversely, a possible clue is offered by the word *wh3.tjw*: it appears for the first time in literary texts of the MK (cfr. Wb I, 348, 1), the word *wh3.t* «Oasis» since the Old Kingdom (cfr. Wb I, 348, 18-23; GIDDY 1987, 140). The writing with 𓆑 is in fact not found in the time of the Old Kingdom and it is also not unquestionably from the Middle Kingdom: the only document with this writing is mentioned by GIDDY (1987, 140) and is pLeiden I 344, which is known to belong to Dynasty XIX, even if the text itself, the Admonitions of Ipuwer, surely is not to be placed later than Middle Kingdom. The writing can at least be taken from an earlier copy. In any case this clue, as well as most of the others, suggests a situation in the Middle Kingdom. To sum up, the following can be said about this short inscription:

In a period not better determined, possibly in the Sixth but presumably during the Twelfth Dynasty, a *jmj-r3 pr* named *Mrj* was in the whereabouts of the sandstone rock as described above, and was going to meet not better specified oasis dwellers. The reasons for the meeting and the place will, as all the rest, remain to us obscure.

Note by Wally Lama

This hieratic inscription was found in 1992 by W. Lama (Lama Expedition) about 30 km south of the Dakhla Oasis. Other engravings are to be seen on the rocks of the site. The inscription was first mentioned to Théodore Monod in March 1993 and a picture was published in Monod's book (SERS J.-F., SOUS LA DIRECTION DE TH. MONOD, 1994. Désert Libyque. Paris: Arthaud, p. 204). Subsequently, documents of the inscription were given to Prof. Dr Günter Burkard of the Institut für Ägyptologie der Universität München, who worked on the translation.

References

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