PROFIT OR EXPLOITATION?
THE PRODUCTION OF PRIVATE RAMESSEIDE TOMBS
WITHIN THE WEST THEBAN FUNERARY ECONOMY*

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Abstract
Existing economic models for Egyptian craft activity are currently dominated by theories of state redistribution, to the extent that market driven economic systems, as evidenced in the ancient texts themselves, may have been overlooked. This article examines New Kingdom textual material from western Thebes, reconsidering how private tomb production might fit updated economic models – models that allow for private sector, pre-modern and pre-capitalist market activity within any redistributive state economic context.

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1 Helck, “Wer Konnte sich ein Begräbnis in Theben-West Leisten?”
tomb chapels made by these official craftsmen. Helck’s conclusions that officials were required to pay for tomb construction and decoration to state craftsmen out of their own pockets with grain or other commodities, rather than the tomb being a benefit of their state position, is a powerful argument that many Polanyist, substantivist, or primitivist scholars might find problematic because they conclude that the ancient Egyptian economy was redistributive and state controlled. Helck’s claim should be seriously considered, but without the baggage of outdated redistributionist theories:

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3 These terms often overlap with each other in the literature. For the Polanyist perspective, see Polanyi, Arenberg, and Pearson, eds., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires.* For a primitive perspective, see Dalton, “Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies.” For a substantivist perspective, see Janssen, *Commodity Prices.*

4 For the notion that redistribution is the best way to describe the ancient Egyptian economy, see Janssen, “Die Struktur der Pharaonischen Wirtschaft,” 69-74; Guggesell, *Arbeiter und Pharaonen,* 181-83; Bleiberg, “The Economy of Ancient Egypt.”

5 For similar discussions with regard to the ancient Classical world, see Manning and Morris, eds., *The Ancient Economy;* Scheidel and von Reden, eds., *The Ancient*
if private officials were financially responsible for their own tomb chapels and burial chambers, who were they paying to build and decorate these structures?

In a later article, “Who Made the Private Tombs of Thebes,” John Romer claims that Deir el Medina texts connected to private tomb production relate only to the creation of tombs in the village itself (which will be shown in this article to be incorrect). In other words, Romer maintains that relying on the west Theban documentation alone cannot prove Heck’s statement that members of state workshops earned a side living decorating private Theban tombs. Instead Romer employs a statistical analysis of the numbers of private tombs decorated through time, concluding that during the 18th Dynasty and Ramesside Period, approximately eight decorated private tombs were created every ten years in western Thebes – almost one tomb during each year. Based on outdated and now inaccurate reign assignments from Porter and Moss as well as the atypical chronology of Wente and van Siclen, he concludes that private tomb production was reasonably consistent throughout time, suggesting to him a permanent work force for private tomb production. Romer then links the Deir el Medina workers with this hypothetical permanent work force although, according to him, “none of the numerous surviving Deir el-Medina work records of the period” mention this private tomb work. Examining the archaeological data, Romer finds that the rate of production of both royal and private tombs followed similar cycles of activity, leading him to make the theoretical jump that this pattern must have been reflective of “a permanent workforce” that was “directed by a single authority.” According to him, that “single authority” must have been the Deir el Medina craft organization, as it appears foremost in west Theban textual sources. To Romer, therefore, stable and consistent tomb production is a clear marker of authoritarian,

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Economy. For updated economic theories applied to Mesopotamia, see Powell, “Preise.” For an Egyptological re-evaluation, see Warburton, “Work and Compensation in Ancient Egypt.”

6 Romer, “Who Made the Private Tombs of Thebes?”
7 Ibid., 212.
8 Porter and Moss, eds., Topographical Bibliography, Vol. I. For updates of Porter and Moss and re-assignments of private tombs to or from the reign of Thutmose IV, see Bryan, The Reign of Thutmose IV.
9 Wente and Van Siclen, “A Chronology of the New Kingdom.”
10 Romer, “Who Made the Private Tombs of Thebes?,” 211.
state-run control. This theoretical leap is similar in its logic to those of the quasi-structuralist Manfred Gutgesell\textsuperscript{11} or the substantivist-primitivist Jac Janssen,\textsuperscript{12} who believe that stable prices are proof of strict state control and/or redistribution systems. For Romer, tomb building patterns that are consistent through time automatically imply authoritative state control. However, what Romer does not see is that these tomb building patterns actually mirror larger economic movements between prosperity and recession, driven by a number of socioeconomic and political factors, which would have affected the entire population of western Thebes – in both the state and the private sectors.

This article expands this discussion of craft specialization and the economic foundations of private tomb production in the New Kingdom. It focuses on the textual evidence from Western Thebes, including receipts, workshop records, legal suits, and letters, and their relation to the production of private tombs in Western Thebes during the Ramesside Period in order to ask the following questions: What was the actual cost of building and decorating a private tomb and how does this compare to the costs of other funerary materials? Did the Deir el Medina craftsmen decorate private tombs as part of a formal gang organization? or, were they working informally, as part of smaller community workgroups? And finally, how did the role of Deir el Medina artisans within a formal, attached craft-specialist group affect their work in informal, unattached, private-sector settings?\textsuperscript{13} Ultimately I question whether the craft work described in documents available to us, carried out by the main body of Deir el Medina artisans, might be representative of private economic gain in a market economy, as opposed to exploitation by gang leaders within a strict, authoritative, redistributive system.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Gutgesell, \textit{Arbeiter und Pharaonen}.
\textsuperscript{13} For non-Egyptological scholarship on craft specialization, see the following: Brumfiel and Earle, \textit{Specialization, Exchange and Complex Societies}; Clark and Parry, “Craft Specialization and Cultural Complexity”; Costin and Wright, \textit{Craft and Social Identity}; Sinopoli, “The Organization of Craft Production at Vijayanagara”; Stein, “Heterogeneity, Power, and Political Economy.”
\textsuperscript{14} For a review of theories associated with ancient Egyptian economic history, see Cooney, \textit{The Cost of Death}; Cooney, \textit{Value of Private Funerary Art}. 
Private Tomb Lexicography

The craftsmen of Deir el Medina are widely credited with the creation and decoration of their own private tombs neighboring the village. More open to discussion is whether these craftsmen also decorated any of the many private tombs of officials in Thebes and adjacent areas during the 19th and 20th Dynasties. There are many words connected with funerary architecture, including (m)/h’t, st-krs, ky, lyne, stjyt and mr. The nuances of meaning between these terms are not completely clear, causing uncertainty as to what was being produced, for whom and under what circumstances. For example, the Tomb Robbery Papyri provide a number of words related to various tomb elements, but the texts lack clarity concerning the different designations. In one section, Peet can only vaguely translate the terminology describing different parts or types of tombs: ni mnu kyw mh5w st sf m haw pn hi ni rdjw “The pyramids, graves and tombs examined this day by the inspectors.”15 These vague lexicographical interpretations must be addressed before further consideration of the systems of production is possible.

West Theban textual material contains at least 31 mentions of private tombs (referred to as mr, (m)/h’t, ky, lyne, or st-krs)16 in a socioeconomic context—that is, as commodities that can be commissioned, bought and sold, or inherited. Eight of these examples refer to the private tomb as a (m)/h’t (“pyramids, graves and tombs examined this day by the inspectors.”17 Only one west Theban ostracoon mentions the ky (“tomb”) in a socioeconomic context, and it is probably a word for “tomb” of pre-Ramesside date.18 By the

15 See P. Abbot, pg. 2, 1, in Peet, The Great Tomb-Robberies, 37, pl. 1, 2,1.
16 I would like to thank Rob Demarée for his generous help with these difficult terms. He provided many helpful references as well as information from his ongoing research (personal communication, October 2004).
17 O. Cairo 25213, 8 rt., O. Cairo 25501, 1 vs., O. Cairo 25517, 9, O. Cairo 25521, 6 vs., O. DeM 112, 2 vs., O. Ashmolean HO 183, 1-2 vs., O. Strasbourg H. 174, 1-3 rt., O. Turin 57378, 4-7, P. Turin 2070 / 154, 5-6, col. II, vs.
18 O. Berlin 10666, 2-4 probably dates to the late Eighteenth Dynasty. This text reads, “Month 1 of prt, day 1. This day of beginning work of the men which is in the ky tomb of the praised one, including Ru-snh.” The Deir el Medina online database translates, “An diesem Tag: Beginn des Arbeitsprojekts der Männer, die im Grab des Gehörten sind. Namenliste davon: Ru-snh.” The database includes the note, “Wohl nicht Name des Grabherrn, sondern [Beginn der] Namenliste. Merkwürdig bleibt, weshalb die Liste nur 1 Eintrag ausweist.” See www.uni-muenchen.de/dem-online. For the word ky, also see Lesko, Dictionary of Late Egyptian, I, 52.
New Kingdom, *ts nḫ nḏt* seems to have been used to describe not only rock cut tombs but also tombs with masonry built chapels. The word *nḫ nḏt* is broad enough in meaning to refer to the entire tomb complex, but the context of these economic records often seems to describe only the decorated tomb chapel. Some of the receipts and letters discussed below record a price for the decoration of a particular amount of wall area in the *nḫ nḏt* tomb, strongly suggesting that, in the context of these transaction texts, only the tomb chapel was meant, rather than the entire tomb. Considering this, the most problematic aspect of the word *nḫ nḏt* remains how much of the private tomb it actually describes. It is not clear if the word *nḫ nḏt* refers to the entire tomb or only to the tomb chapel. And if *nḫ nḏt* does refer to the entire tomb, is there a word reserved exclusively for the tomb chapel?

The *ḥnw* is best translated as “chapel,” but not every chapel is necessarily funerary in nature. In socioeconomic texts from western Thebes, the *ḥnw* can be described with a *ws ḫt* forecourt, as in O. Ashmolean HO 132. The *ḥnw* can be dedicated to the deified Amenhotep F or to other deities, such as the goddess Mut (O. Deir el Medina 297). People can dwell (*ḥms*) in the *ḥnw*, sometimes along with their animals. But a *ḥnw* can also belong to an individual, as they can be passed on to the next generation in inheritance texts. One such inheritance text, O. Ashmolean HO 23 reads: “[...] about the division of property of his father ‘nh[..].’” This broken introduction is followed by a list of names. Then at the end of line 5, we read:

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20 For example, see Grandet, Catalogue des Ostraca Hiératiques..., no. 983. For the meanings of "dwelling," "resting place," "chapel," "temple," or "cellar, crypt," see Lesko, Dictionary of Late Egyptian, II, 179.
21 For the *ws ḫt*, see Spencer, The Egyptian Temple.
22 All Ashmolean ostraca were previously named O. Gardiner.
23 O. Ashmolean HO 152, O. DeM 248, P. DeM 16.
24 O. Ashmolean HO 132, O. Ashmolean HO 166, O. Berlin P 10637, and perhaps O. BM EA 5637.
25 O. Ashmolean HO 23, O. Ashmolean HO 103, P. Berlin 10496 vs., P. BM 10055 vs. 1, 13, P. Bulaq 10, P. DeM 26R.
likewise his *hnuw* chapel and his ‘ṭ hut which is in the *šḥyt* fields, and his *ḥtt* tomb. And one gave the house of ‘r-nḥḥ, his *hnuw* chapel, his ‘ḥt tomb, his ‘ṭ hut, which is in the *šḥyt* fields to the crewman *Mswh*. . . .

This text clearly differentiates the *hnuw* chapel from the *ḥtt* tomb, indicating that in this case, they are separate properties in space. Therefore, not only can *hnuw* chapels be passed on in inheritance texts, but they are set apart from other types of immovable property, including the *ḥtt* tomb, the ‘ṭ hut, and the *pr* house. This makes it difficult to definitively associate the *hnuw* with the tomb chapel belonging to the *ḥtt* tomb. The *hnuw* can also be sold outright, as seen in the receipt O. Cairo [181]27 where line 4 reads “the place next to his *hnuw* which he sold to me, making [. . .] *dbn*.” All of this evidence suggests that the word must have had a much broader meaning than “funerary chapel.”

Still unclear in any of these socioeconomic texts, however, is whether the *hnuw* chapel ever describes the funerary chapel of a tomb or if the word only refers to non-funerary chapels. The one association of the *hnuw* chapel with the *wšḥt* in O. Ashmolean HO 132 seems to link this word more specifically with a courtyard and therefore perhaps a public chapel space, funerary or non-funerary. Because of the broad meaning of this word, socioeconomic texts with the *hnuw* will be included in the following analysis, but with strong reservations about the word’s nature as a funerary space.

Another word associated with the private tomb is *šṭyt* or *šṭyt*, and it likely refers to the “burial chamber.”28 O. IFAO 88129 is a small ostracon with two lines, most probably used in an oracle decision, reading, “one gives/sells the *šṭyt* burial chamber of *Wā*[- . . .].” This suggests it was possible to sell a *šṭyt*, or at least pass it on generationally, indicating that a burial chamber was considered independent of its associated tomb chapel. It also suggests the possibility that this particular tomb was of lower

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27 This Cairo ostracon is unpublished and numbered only by Černý. O. Cairo [181], [154], and [182] all come from excavations by Mond at Sheikh abd el Gurnah. Transcription from Černý, “Unpublished Notebooks.”


29 Černý, “Troisème Série de Questions Adressées Aux Oracles.”
socioeconomic value and did not have a tomb chapel attached. The Twentieth Dynasty letter O. Deir el Medina 789 also mentions a ḫyt chamber and reads:

**Recto:** Please may you cause that Mry-ṣḥmt build the ḫ[ḥ] in few hours, under the supervision of Mry-ḥnw. And may you carry [. . .] And may you cause that one bring to [. . .]

**Verso:** Likewise one fish, some salted (?) meat and [. . .] sun bread

No price is mentioned, but the construction of the burial chamber in this text seems to have been commissioned, perhaps in this letter. The mr ḫḥ is usually translated as “pyramid,”31 and the texts show that it was also built, decorated, and passed on through generations. The specificity of this word is very problematic; it is not clear whether the word mr refers to the small masonry built pyramid, to the carved pyramidion atop it, or even to the painted masonry chapel under this small pyramid. The mr pyramid usually appears in a legal context in socioeconomic documents from western Thebes. There are four references in four different texts,32 and three of them are legal inheritance texts passing the pyramid, and one would thus assume the entire tomb, on to the next generation. Only Ostracon Deir el Medina 215 mentions the payment of mtnw, “recompense,” to a draftsman for decoration work on a mr pyramid.

Another common name for a tomb type is the st-ḥrs ḫḥ, literally “place of burial,” which probably denotes a space within an already existing family tomb chamber or some small, undecorated installation lacking a tomb chapel. This word is most often mentioned in legal and inheritance texts.33 In Papyrus Bulaq X (P. Cairo 58092),34 a son provides a st-ḥrs for both his mother and father, an act which grants him ownership of their property. A st-ḥrs does not seem to be an actual piece of property that could be built, bought, or sold, but rather a reserved place of interment within a larger burial property. No socioeconomic texts refer to the construction or decoration of a st-ḥrs burial place; only legal texts

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32 O. DeM 215, 3-4, O. DeM 586, 8, P. Bulaq X / P. Cairo 58092, 2 rt., P. Turin 2070 / 154, 5-6, col. II, vs.
33 For example in O. Petrie 18, 8 rt., and P. Bulaq X (P. Cairo 58092, 2 rt.).
34 Janssen and Pestman, “Burial and Inheritance.”
use this particular label. It is not a commissioned funerary location, but rather refers to a spot where a coffin set or mummy could be placed.

Price Evidence for Private Sector Tomb Production
by Deir el Medina Artisans

After this brief lexicographical review, we can now return to the remarks by Helck and Romer about private tomb construction. Helck and Romer have both claimed that Deir el Medina artisans did indeed work in the many private tombs of Western Thebes for officials of the state bureaucracy. Given their specialization painting royal burial chambers, the craftsmen of Deir el Medina were more than capable of creating and decorating their own private tombs. Adjacent to the village was the workmen’s necropolis containing 454 tombs of which 54 (about 12%) have decorated chapels or burial chambers. Not all decorated tombs were fully polychrome. Bernard Bruyère has documented many examples that refrained from incorporating expensive pigments such as blue and green. Deir el Medina craftsmen decorated their own tombs to be sure, but did they also craft those of the local Theban officials, and if so, under what circumstances?

Very few texts document the construction or decoration of private tombs in the larger west Theban area. Candy Keller maintains that Deir el Medina workers used their skills to cut and decorate nobles’ tombs outside of their village, and she proves this by examining the stylistic similarities of Deir el Medina artists’ hands in Theban Tomb 65 and Theban Tomb 113, among others, comparing them to signed figured ostraca or local Deir el Medina funerary painting. Egyptologists have yet to systematically examine the

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36 Eyre, “Work and Organization of Work in the New Kingdom,” esp. 197. For a description of the Deir el Medina tomb architecture and decoration, see Barthelmess, Der Übergang ins Jenseits, 131-36. See also Keller, “Royal Painters,” esp. 57. Also see Bruyère and Kuentz, La Tombe de Nacht-Min et la Tombe d’Ari-Nefer. For a value judgment of these Deir el Medina tombs, Janssen, Commodity Prices, 335.
37 Bruyère, Tombes Thébaines de Deir el Médineh à Décoration Monochrome.
west Theban textual material concerning private sector tomb production, probably because only very few texts mention the crafting of private tombs with actual prices (see Table 1).

The undated O. Ashmolean HO 183⁴⁹ is one of only two receipts that describe the purchase of work in a private mꜣḥt tomb:

**Recto:** List of all the commissions which the workman Pꜣꜣ-m-dšꜣ-rꜣ-t∆ did for Ṭmₜₜ-m-dšₜₜₜ-∆ił: 1 set coffin, varnished, its kḥub body part (?) being green its nṣi(?⁴⁰) being yellow orpiment (ḥat)⁴¹ making 40 dbn. Precious wood: 1 sḥt mummy board, varnished, and decorated making 25 dbn. List of the work of the tomb (mḥš’t) making [. . .]

**Verso:** while I was missing 28 dni⁴² [m suḏm (?)] and remaining to him are 72 dni making 4 dbn of silver. And I said to him: Give to me the 2 dbn of silver and you will take 2 dbn, and he said: it is [. . .]

The recto of this text records craft work of mobile funerary art – coffins and mummy boards for a certain Amenem-diy-ranæb. At the end of the recto, the text moves on to the decoration of a tomb, here called mḥš’t, probably belonging to this same man. Despite the broken nature of this text, it seems clear that 4 dbn of silver – or 240-300 copper dbn depending on the silver to copper ratio⁴³ – were to be paid for 100 dni of decoration work (a measure of area to be painted). Only 2 silver dbn had been paid at that point for 72 dni of area, according to the text. Most interesting is the man to whom all of this craft work was being sold: Amenem-diy-ranæb, a man without a craft title, and as far as the west Theban documents show, not associated with the Deir el Medina work crew. He was probably an elite outsider coming to the village of Deir el Medina for private craft work. Clearly, this document strongly counters Romer’s claim that all west Theban textual material dealt exclusively with tomb building confined to the craftsmen’s village itself.

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⁴⁰ The word nṣi seems to mean “hair.” See Hannig, Groβes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch, 434. Erman and Grapow, Wörterbuch, II, 337. The word is also mentioned in P. D’Orbiney 3,2 (Gardiner, Late Egyptian Stories).

⁴¹ For a discussion of the difficult description terminology in this text, see Janssen, Commodity Prices, 218.

⁴² For a discussion of the dni measure of area and a link to the ostraca from the tomb of Senenmut, where the word is also used, see Ibid., 143.

⁴³ Ibid., 101-02.
Table 1: West Theban Receipts, Letters, and Graffiti Mentioning Private Tomb Creation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Text type</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Seller</th>
<th>Price (dbn)</th>
<th>Price in text</th>
<th>Work done</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O. Ashmolean</td>
<td>D. 19</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td>Ny-šš</td>
<td>sšš-kd Ršš-kpt</td>
<td>108 + x dbn</td>
<td>list of commodities</td>
<td>perhaps decoration only</td>
<td>rḥt n Ny-šš n sšš-kd Ršš-kpt sšš-kd Ršš-kpt sšš-kd Ršš-kpt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HO 133</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Ashmolean</td>
<td>D. 19</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td>Imn-m-dl-huwy-ab</td>
<td>Imn-m-dl-huwy-ab</td>
<td>240 (?)</td>
<td>4 dbn of</td>
<td>decoration only</td>
<td>only</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HO 133, 1-2 vs.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Berlin</td>
<td>late D. XVIII (?) / early D. 19</td>
<td>workshop record (?)</td>
<td>Ty-m-sub</td>
<td>Ty-m-sub</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>beginning of work on Ty tomb recorded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Brooklyn</td>
<td>late D. 19</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td>ḫnasw  Mry-r (?)</td>
<td>rmt-ḥt  Tmn (?-m-)</td>
<td>6 + x dbn (?)</td>
<td>vegetables,</td>
<td>decoration only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37.1880 E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sieve, textiles, oil, grain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Cairo [181]</td>
<td>Ramesseide</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. DeM 198, 1-3 vs.</td>
<td>D. 19</td>
<td>receipt</td>
<td>Šr-nḥt</td>
<td>Mry-šḥmnt</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6 ṣw$k and 2 ḫpt</td>
<td>decoration only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. DeM 215, 3-4</td>
<td>D. 19, yr. 1 Seti II or Siptah</td>
<td>receipt (?)</td>
<td>rmt-ḥt Nb [..]</td>
<td>sšš-kd Bku-šḥ [kw]</td>
<td>18.5 (?)</td>
<td>commodities worth 17-20 (+x) dbn</td>
<td>decoration only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. DeM 789</td>
<td>D. 20</td>
<td>letter</td>
<td>Mry-šḥmnt</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>construction</td>
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(continued on next page)
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<tr>
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<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Seller</th>
<th>Price (dbn)</th>
<th>Price in text</th>
<th>Work done</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| O. Strasbourg| Ramesside  | letter     | “mayor of| “mayor of| *              |             |               |            | p° bks w m ts
              |            |            | the town” | the town”|               |             |               |            | "ts p° hki" n n text         |
| O. Turin 57378, 4-7 | D. 19    | transaction| receipt  | 11-14 (?)| 1 suk + 2 ḫr + 1 ḫr + 2 ḫt + 1 suk |             |               |            | ndyt n fs mbk w m ts “k" |

Table 1: (cont.)
This Ashmolean ostracon describes a non Deir el Medina (m)ḥt tomb, probably of average or below average size, and it is being sold to an outsider of Deir el Medina. The price of 240-300 dbn is much more expensive than the average cost of 30 dbn for a standard mummiform wt coffin or 40 dbn for a wt ʿ outer coffin. In other words, the cost to paint an average sized west Theban tomb chapel was at least 8 to 10 times more expensive than the average mummiform coffin sold by Deir el Medina workmen. One could probably assume that tomb chapel decoration for highly placed Theban elites was often much more expensive than what we see in this text. For example, O. Turin 57368 preserves a receipt for a wt coffin sold by the scribe of the tomb Hori, for a large sum of 145 dbn. In another text, P. Turin Giornale 17B, lines 7-17 vs., an expensive coffin set is sold to a Chantress of Amen by the name of Tanedjem, most probably not a Deir el Medina resident. In this text, her inner coffin costs 200 dbn, the outer coffin 95 dbn, and the mummy board 34 dbn. If an elite individual could afford to spend such sums on just one coffin set, it seems likely that the price for tomb cutting and decoration would be proportionally higher for this class of commissioner, and therefore total much more than the 300 copper dbn recorded in the Ashmolean text, probably even extending into the thousands of dbn.

Deir el Medina workmen earned 11-14 dbn of copper per month, on average, at the going rates of exchange between grain and copper known from the village. The cost of the tomb chapel decoration mentioned in the Ashmolean ostracon (240-300 dbn) accordingly represents approximately 20 months’ wages. Given these costs, it seems that very few Deir el Medina workmen could have afforded such a tomb. Even with the extra income earned by painting coffins and other funerary items in the private sector, only the highest ranking village scribes, crew leaders and draftsmen would have had the means for such construction.

Because the Ashmolean ostracon quoted above probably documents work done for a Theban official (Amenem-diy-raneb) and

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not a Deir el Medina crewman, it is the best evidence we have for village artisans performing tomb craft work in the private sector. Another Nineteenth Dynasty Ostracon, O. Turin 57378, 4-7\textsuperscript{48} states that 11-14 \textit{dbn} were paid for \textit{mtnw}, or “recompense” for work done in a private tomb (\textit{šny}):  

What was given to him as recompense for the tomb (\textit{šny}): 1 thin \textit{dušw} basket of a woman making 1 sukel, 1 [basket object] making 2 ḫpt, [. . .] making 1 ḫn, 2 ḫpt, making 1 sukel.\textsuperscript{49}  

Line 4 of this text contains the formula “What was given to him as recompense for the tomb,” followed by a number of commodities worth 11-14 \textit{dbn}, the exact amount depending on how the commodity amounts listed at the end of the text should be understood and added together. As is common with so many socioeconomic texts, important details are left out: we do not know the exact nature of the craft work, nor can the reader ascertain the amount of craft work performed in this private tomb. Furthermore, no individuals are mentioned by name or title. The work paid for in this text was probably decoration work, because the word \textit{mtnw}, or “recompense,” most commonly refers to painting when used in Deir el Medina socioeconomic texts.\textsuperscript{50} If this text does record the painting of an entire tomb chapel, then the document seems to suggest that there were less expensive options for tomb decoration.

Another Nineteenth Dynasty text, Ostracon Deir el Medina 198,\textsuperscript{51} records painting work that was done in a \textit{šty} “burial chamber” for about 31 \textit{dbn} worth of commodities:  

\textbf{Verso:}  

What \textit{s-nḥt} gave to \textit{Mry-shmt} in exchange for the painting of his \textit{šty} burial chamber.

\textsuperscript{48} Lopez, \textit{Ostraca Ieratici}, III, 26, pl. 118.  
\textsuperscript{49} It is unclear if this 1 \textit{suw} is meant to be the equivalent of the commodities that come before it, or if it should be added to the grain amounts as part of the total price for the work in the tomb. Because of this problem understanding the text, the price for this tomb work is either 11 \textit{dbn} or 14 \textit{dbn}.  
This man is probably the same workman of the 19th Dynasty who appears in the following official rosters: O. Ashmolean Museum 57, O. Ashmolean Museum 111, O. Cairo 25519, 25521, 25522, 25523, among others. This crewman is not mentioned in Davies, *Who's Who at Deir el-Medina.*

For identification with “Merysekhmet (ii)” and reference to O. DeM 198, see Ibid., 162-63. Davies states, “The contextual evidence offered by this document certainly appears to corroborate the fact that Merysekhmet’s métier was that of a ‘draftsman.’”

The average of all known *wt* coffin prices is 31.57 *dbn.* The average of secure prices is 29.67 *dbn.* The median of all prices is 25 *dbn.* See Cooney, *The Cost of Death,* chapter 4. Cooney, *Value of Private Funerary Art,* 205.

Bruyère, *Tombes Thébaines de Deir el Médineh à Decoration Monochrome.*

Year 1, month 2 of summer, last day. What was given by(?!) the crewman Nb[... ] to the draftsman Bu-ḥ-ḥw[... ] as the recompense for his mr pyramid: [1 ḫrw of] 1/4 barley making 3 snw, 1 abd basket, 1 khs basket making 2 ḫpt, 1 pair of sandals from pharaoh, l.p.h., making 1 ḫpt, [...] 1 mtnw basket, 1 ḫvr sieve [...]

This text probably refers only to the painting of the masonry built pyramid and stone pyramidion atop it, not the tomb chapel interior. Given the mention of the pyramid, this text may refer to a Deir el Medina tomb. Furthermore, because the draftsman’s title is recorded and because the word mtnw is used, describing craft work, this text’s relevance is likely limited to the painting of the mr pyramid, not the sale of the pyramid itself. The price is partly broken, but 3 snw is more or less equivalent to 15 dbn. Three ḫpt of grain are also added to the price, and this is equal, more or less, to 1.5 dbn. Furthermore, two additional items of basketry are mentioned, the prices of which are lost. This suggests that decoration work on the pyramid cost about 17-20 dbn total, for an admittedly unknown amount of labor.

Even though it remains unclear whether the ḫnw chapel was funerary in nature, there are nonetheless a few prices preserved in the west Theban documentation that should be examined here in the context of commercial exchange. The recto of O. Ashmolean 133, for example, records payment for a ḫnw chapel:

What was given by Nb-ḥt to the draftsman R-ḥtp in exchange for the ḫnw chapel: 1 fine, thin ḫfd sheet making 3 1/2 snw, 1 decorated Book of the Dead papyrus making 1 (silver) ḫnw mib oil [...] large [...], 20 ḫnw of [...]...

This excerpt is the first transaction mentioned in a list of several complicated exchanges recorded in this one text, all involving the draftsman Rahotep. The most glaring interpretational question is: does this text document the purchase of an entire ḫnw chapel, or does it record merely the painting of the chapel? A number of commodities were handed over to Rahotep, who is specifically said to be a draftsman, and his title alone is enough to arouse suspicion that this document was used by him to record payment for his painting work in the ḫnw chapel. The items traded, including high quality cloth probably worth about 15 dbn, a Book of the

57 For this restoration, see Janssen, Commodity Prices, 119.
58 Kitchen, Ramesside Inscriptions, VII, 182-83. Formerly O. Gardiner 133.
59 For the snw – dbn ratio, see Janssen, Commodity Prices, 107.
Dead worth 1 silver dbn, equivalent to 60-100 copper dbn, sesame oil worth 3 dbn, an unknown amount of varnish, and 20 hnw of an unknown oil, add up to a high price with a conservative estimate of at least 108 dbn (using a low price for the Book of the Dead at 70 copper dbn). Given the fact that the price also includes an unknown amount of varnish, the price for this hnwa chapel could easily have approached 120 dbn. This text either records payment for the entire hnwa chapel, or it records only the painting of the hnwa chapel. Despite the uncertainty regarding the hnwa chapel’s funerary nature, this transaction is of interest in that it represents an undertaking of significant cost to its commissioner.

In another text, O. Brooklyn E 37.1880 E, a hnwa chapel is exchanged for a number of commodities. Part of the recto reads:

The crewman ‘Imn-(m)-ipt to the carpenter Mry-‘ in exchange for the h’tl bed: 20 (pieces of) sy (tamarisk) wood, 1 (piece of) mkh wood, 1 hrs basket with 2 ḫḥ (of grain) making 1 ḫḥr and 3 bundles of vegetables. What was given to him: 1 sheep / goat making 1 ḫḥr. What was given to him for his hnwa chapel: 5 bundles of vegetables. What was given to (?) his mother saying, “Cause the completion (of the total price)”: 2 (pieces of) clothing of green (wnts) and ḫḥ object (?). What was given to him: 1 mḥt sieve and 1 hnwa of sesame oil making 1 (?) ḫḥr of emmer wheat.

Lines 4-7 of this text seem to indicate that this hnwa chapel was sold outright, rather than having been commissioned or decorated. At first glance, it appears that this hnwa chapel was exchanged for only 5 bundles of vegetables, the equivalent of a meager 2.5 copper dbn. However, line 5 of the recto records that the price was not complete and that items were given to “his mother” as well, including two possible textile items, 1 mḥt sieve, which are usually worth 1/2 dbn, 1 hnwa of sesame oil, and 1 ḫḥr of emmer, providing the tentative and very low total price of 6 dbn, plus the unknown value of the textiles. Given these two texts, the price

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60 This Book of the Dead’s price is only 1 dbn, but because it is decorated and because all the other prices in the text are in mḥk of silver rather than copper dbn, Janssen assumes that this indicates 1 dbn of silver, not copper, thus equivalent to 60-100 copper dbn, depending on the exchange rate. See Janssen, Commodity Prices, 102, n. 6, 246.
62 Ibid., 147-49.
63 Janssen, Commodity Prices, 559-61.
64 Ibid., 332. The ḫḥr of grain is equal to approximately 2 copper dbn. Ibid., 112-32.
information for the $hnw$ chapel is very confusing. The range in price is extreme, from around 6 $dbn$ to over 100 $dbn$. It is not clear if either of these $hnw$ chapels are funerary in nature, nor is it understood if the payment recorded in these texts represents decoration only or the entire structure. The one clear characteristic of the $hnw$ chapel is that there was a massive range in economic value for these buildings – a trait certainly shared by crafted funerary objects like coffins and mummy boards.65

Evidence for Tomb Production by Deir el Medina Artisans
Outside of the Village

A graffito from the tomb of Ramses VI, dated to the reign of Ramses IX, contains a rare mention of the decoration of a private tomb by Deir el Medina crew members, in this case Theban Tomb 65, belonging to the overseer of the scribes of the Temple of the Estate of Amen-Re, Iyemseba.66 It reads:

Year 9 II $pt$ 14 (?): the draughtsman Amenhotep and his son, the scribe (and) the deputy of the draughtsmen Amennakht, came today to see the Places of Truth ($hwst mʃtyw$) . . . [they found / completed] the drawings according as (or: when) they had executed the decoration in the tomb-chapel [of] . . . the [Overseer of Scribes] of the Temple Iymiseba of the Estate of Amun.67

No prices or spatial details are mentioned in this graffito. Furthermore, the text is quite broken, and some of the restorations are insecure. Nonetheless, it does prove that Deir el Medina workmen were active in the tombs of highly placed Theban officials, in the so-called Places of Truth ($hwst mʃtyw$), not to be confused with the village of Deir el Medina. It also demonstrates that crewmen with leading Deir el Medina titles, such as “draughtsman” or “deputy,” were those most often mentioned in the texts that document craft work outside of their village. In this case, it could be assumed that the well known draftsman Amennakht and his son, a deputy, organized decoration work in the tomb chapel of a scribal official associated with the Amen temple organization.

67 For this translation with restorations and corrections of Spiegelberg’s copy, see Keller, “How Many Draughtsmen Named Amenhotep?” 124.
Another graffito found in Theban Tomb 113 of Kynebu\textsuperscript{68} tells us that craft work in this private tomb began in the: “First (month) of Inundation, day 13” and ended in the “First (month) of winter, day 2.” The text was probably written by a Deir el Medina crewman, providing another circumstantial hint that Deir el Medina workmen could be organized to do tomb decoration work outside of the village. The text records that it required about 3 1/2 months from start to finish for the decoration work on the small (n)\textsuperscript{b}t tomb of the Theban priest Kynebu, but no prices are mentioned. This renders the amount of time mentioned in the text practically meaningless in an economic context because first, it is not known how large the work crew was, second, it is unknown if the work was uninterrupted given that Deir el Medina crewmen could be active in many other duties, and most importantly because there are no prices mentioned in this text to correlate the amount of work with actual labor hours. In fact, no Deir el Medina texts from the private sector clearly link labor time to price,\textsuperscript{69} forcing the researcher to discuss the material or craft value, rather than the value of time.

A Ramesside letter written on O. Strasbourg H. 174\textsuperscript{70} mentions work by Deir el Medina craftsmen in a tomb belonging to the mayor of the town, but no payment of any kind is recorded:

The scribe Ima-ks to his lord the scribe Bn-g, the one who was working in the tomb (\textit{\textit{n}}\textit{b}t) of the mayor of the town. To the effect that: Listen to the message (\textit{htbt}) which you made, saying, “Cause that one (bring?) to me the scribe Sr-muet and \textit{Pn-\ldots}.” It is the coming to completion of 1 cubit, 2 cubits, The message to you which I sent is good today. Nineteen in the \ldots.

Because the name of the first scribe (Amenqen) is difficult to read,\textsuperscript{71} the man’s connection to Deir el Medina is unclear. He writes to “his master,” an external scribe named Benga associated with the office of the mayor of Thebes. The text does indicate that west

\textsuperscript{68} Amer, “A Unique Theban Tomb Inscription under Ramesses VIII”. The translations used here are Amer’s.


\textsuperscript{70} Koenig, \textit{Les Ostraca Hieratiques Inédits}, 14, pls. 86, 87, 132.

\textsuperscript{71} This name is read as Amen-qen in the Deir el Medina online database (http://www.leidenuniv.nl/nino/dmd/dmd.html). The middle part of the name is not clear according to the facsimile and the photograph of the ostracon. The first sign group reading Ima and the last sign of the man holding the stick are clearly read.
Theban craftsmen, and perhaps Deir el Medina scribes, were in contact with highly placed bureaucrats for high level commissions and that Deir el Medina workmen, like Samut, certainly worked in the tombs of high Theban officials, such as the mayor. The text also proves that letters were sent to secure the employment of certain artisans and to inform the tomb owner’s scribe as to how much work had been completed on a given day. How Deir el Medina workmen were paid for this kind of work, however, is still unclear, because absolutely no price information is found in this letter, as is common with this genre of text. This lack of contextual and financial detail is one of the most frustrating characteristics of west Theban letters.

The examination of these west Theban texts has already provided more insight into the creation of non-royal tombs outside of Deir el Medina during the Ramesside Period than either Romer or Helck allowed for. Despite Romer’s flawed chronological methodology, and our incapacity to judge the chronological implications of Friedericke Kampp’s work, in which are documented hundreds more undecorated New Kingdom tombs, it seems that we can indeed conclude that the frequency of decorated tomb production, irrespective of reign assignments, is unlikely to amount to more than one tomb per year. If only one elite tomb was constructed and decorated every year in western Thebes, we should not expect to find much textual evidence for tomb production when compared to the relative wealth of documentation concerning the creation of coffins or other funerary arts, which were much more accessible, economically, to the larger ancient Egyptian population.

In fact, for the entire Ramesside Period I know of only three prices recorded for production of the (m)ḥt or ṣḥḥt tomb, perhaps four if we include the painting work of the mr pyramid from O. Deir el Medina 215. There are two prices for the ḫnḫ chapel, but as stated above, it is by no means certain that this structure was funerary in nature. In contrast, there are 150 prices for the creation and decoration of various types of coffins, including the wt anthropoid coffin (96 prices), the wt ṣḥ outer coffin (17 prices), the wt ṣḥi inner coffin (9 prices), and the sḥḥt mummy board (28 prices). Admittedly, many of these coffins belonged together as sets and

72 Kampp, Die Thebanische Nekropole.
were used to bury only one individual. Even if we assume that many of these prices represent a smaller number of coffin sets, the price records imply that coffins were produced 40-50 times more often than decorated private tombs in the west Theban region during the Ramesside Period. This ratio of 50:1 should not be shocking as decorated family tombs generally contained more than one burial.\footnote{74 In Theban Tomb 1, the one intact burial chamber found at Deir el Medina, 20 bodies were found, but only 9 of these were buried in decorated coffins. The other 11 were wrapped only in mats and textiles. (Shedid and Shedid, \textit{Das Grab des Sennedjem}, 15). Also see Toda and Daressy, “La Decouverte et l’inventaire du Tombeau de Sen-Nezem.”} Furthermore, the vast majority of ancient Egyptians were interred in undecorated burial chambers without a connected tomb chapel. This ratio also seems to mirror the socioeconomic trend of mid Dynasty 20 – a move away from decorated tomb chapels and towards large undecorated tomb caches containing hundreds of coffins.\footnote{75 Zivie, “Un Détour par Saqqara: Deir el Médineh et la Nécropole Memphite.” And Personal communication from Zivie, April 17 2004. At the keynote lecture of the annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Zivie suggested that the tomb of Netjerwymes may have been decorated by the Nineteenth Dynasty} Thus, the small number of price texts for private tomb decoration is understandable in the context of overall tomb cost and accessibility, the later Ramesside economic recession, and the trend towards large undecorated tomb caches.

Still, a few texts do link Deir el Medina individuals to private tomb decoration – both within the village and beyond (O. Ashmolean HO 183, O. Turin 57378, O. Deir el Medina 198, O. Deir el Medina 215, graffito in tomb of Ramses VI, graffito in TT 113, O. Strasbourg H. 174), and many of these texts clearly indicate that craftsmen were paid for this work. The small number of prices itself provides no reason to assume that Deir el Medina craftsmen were not active in the private tomb decoration market in the Ramesside Period. Alain Zivie has even suggested that Deir el Medina workmen of the Ramesside Period participated in the decoration of private tomb chapels at Saqqara. Not only did he find evidence of Eighteenth Dynasty craftsmen called \textit{sgmn-} st \textit{Mf\$ at Saqqara, but he found stylistic similarities between Ramesside Saqqara tomb painting and that of Deir el Medina or the royal Theban tombs.\footnote{76 Zivie, “Un Détour par Saqqara: Deir el Médineh et la Nécropole Memphite.” And Personal communication from Zivie, April 17 2004. At the keynote lecture of the annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Zivie suggested that the tomb of Netjerwymes may have been decorated by the Nineteenth Dynasty} This link between Deir el Medina craftsmen and Saqqara is much more tenuous during the Ramesside Period, but
if it is substantiated, then some Deir el Medina draftsmen and scribes had the time, ability, and organizational workshop infrastructure to travel hundreds of miles downriver, spending weeks at a time away from home, in order to supplement their state income. It would also strongly suggest that their reputations as the painters of the royal tombs placed them in high demand, making them the desired artisans of the Egyptian elite, of those most able to afford decorated tomb chapels in the first place.

Interestingly, none of the Deir el Medina socioeconomic texts involving private tombs indicate the actual cost of cutting a tomb from the living rock. The documentation only preserves receipts for the painting of a tomb chapel, tomb chamber or a masonry pyramid. There are no prices for stone work, although there is some indication that the Deir el Medina crew did indeed cut private tombs (such as O. Cairo 25243 discussed below). My previous investigation of the production of private sector coffins and other funerary items shows a similar trend: the Deir el Medina workmen clearly specialized in draftsmanship as their private sector craft activity, rather than stone or wood working.\textsuperscript{77} To this end, no titles associated with stone cutting are found in the documentation of private sector funerary art production. Perhaps most transportable stonework – stelae or pyramidia – was crafted near a quarry site, and thus the associated texts, if any were created, might be found at a location nearby. Under such a scenario, workers who actually cut the tombs of Western Thebes would most often be those associated with a quarry, rather than the villagers of Deir el Medina, whose draftsmanship, in the private sector at least, seems to have been their most valued skill.\textsuperscript{78} One of the many confusing features in the west Theban textual material (as it pertains to private funerary art) is


\textsuperscript{78} Deir el Medina crew members did also cut the tombs in the Valley of the Kings as part of their state sector labor, but because these tombs needed to remain secret, the number of workers had to be restricted, requiring these men to also do stone cutting. In their private sector work, on the other hand, the work of Deir el Medina crewmen was valuable in terms of painting, not in terms of stone cutting, which was work that could be left to unskilled laborers. I would like to thank David Warburton for bringing this value difference to my attention (personal communication, May 2007).
the focus on crafted wooden objects and the decoration thereof. Many texts document painting in the private sector private crafts market, but the large majority involve wooden goods such as coffins or domestic furniture. Very rarely are stelae mentioned (and in one of the four textual references to them, the stela is said to be made of wood). Only Ostracon Berlin 14256 discusses actual payment for stone stelae, and this receipt probably documents only the decoration thereof, not the construction. The same is true for mr pyramids or pyramidia. Only one price exists for a mr pyramid, and it documents decoration rather than the crafting of the stone (O. Deir el Medina 215, see above). This lack of reference in the Deir el Medina textual archive to funerary stonework or to funerary objects crafted in stone is puzzling given the stonework and stone-painting specialization of the crew in the royal tomb, not to mention the hundreds of stone stelae found in the village itself. We know only that Deir el Medina crewmen were sometimes paid for painting private Theban tombs, but whether they were also paid for cutting tombs out of the living rock remains unclear. For now, the extant west Theban documentation suggests that these craftsmen specialized almost exclusively in painting in the private sector.

Tomb Journal Texts and Evidence for Private Sector Tomb Production

The west Theban textual documentation, scarce as it is, suggests that as little as 11 dbn or as much as 300 dbn could be paid for tomb painting. Almost all of the texts examined thus far are receipts, and as a result, they fail to provide information about organizational infrastructure of the private sector workshop. Receipts record prices and the means of exchange, but they do not tell us if the Deir el Medina craftsmen decorated private tombs as part of a formal gang, or if they were working informally, as part of smaller community workgroups. To shed light on how private sector tomb work may have been organized, it becomes necessary to examine entries from the so-called Deir el Medina tomb journal, a body

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79 O. Deir el Medina 129.
81 Most of these official texts are from the Cairo collection and catalogue because of their findspot in the Valley of the Kings. Many of these texts were discovered by Theodore Davies and Lord Carnarvon-Howard Carter’s expeditions.
of textual material that recorded the day to day activities of the craftsmen when they were working together as a group (see Table 2).

In one text from the royal tomb journal of late Dynasty 20 – O. Cairo 25250, rt. (see Fig. 2)82 – we see a list of workmen’s personal names followed by crafted wooden objects such as gbt boxes, mšt boxes, hšl beds, or other wooden items.

As can be seen in the transcription, some lines have been crossed out, suggesting that the work was perhaps completed. No prices are mentioned, but the text indicates that small scale craft production, presumably for the private sector, occurred at the official work site in the Valley of the Kings where this text was found.83 Another late Dynasty 20 text – Ostracon Cairo 2524384 – suggests that the crew sometimes performed private sector tomb production as a group. This particular ostracon is a journal of the royal tomb found in KV 6 of Rameses IX, and line 8 of the recto reads, “Day 14, cutting the tomb of the high priest.” The text indicates that much of this commission was performed during work hours. No other details of possible payment or organization are mentioned. The verso of another late Dynasty 20 tomb journal [P. Turin 1906 + 1939 + 2047]85 preserves grain deliveries and other details of work, including the following lines (2:6-2:7):

That which Msw did: 3 day[s] of work on the wooden gbt sarcophagus of Py-hm-wtr.

That which Msw did: one day of carrying stones.

Line 2:6 (see Fig. 3) records a crewman spending three days working on the gbt sarcophagus of a man who is not from Deir el Medina – Pakhemnetjer. In lines 2:8-2:10 is written “What was given to him,” followed by a long list of commodities, including vegetables, fish, beer, grain, all “from the hand of the son of Pakhemnetjer.” It would appear that this workman was actually paid with a number of commodities by the future sarcophagus owner’s son, whose father may or may not have already died.86

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82 Daressy, Ostraca. Nos. 25001-25385, 65, pl. LIII. For a correct transcription, see Černý, “Unpublished Notebooks.”
83 The provenance for this text is probably Tomb KV 6 (Rameses IX) or Tomb KV 9 (Rameses VI).
85 Kitchen, Ramesside Inscriptions, VI, 624-30.
86 This of course reminds one of the famous “law of the pharaoh,” which indicates that the one who takes on the financial responsibility of burying the parent will inherit their fortune. See Janssen and Pestman, “Burial and Inheritance.”
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<td>legal record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Bulaq X / P. Cairo 58092, 2 rt.</td>
<td>D. 20</td>
<td>legal record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tnyf mst st-kos 1, gave a burial to mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Bulaq X / P. Cairo 58092, 2 rt.</td>
<td>D. 20</td>
<td>legal record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tnyf st-kos, a burial for his father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Bulaq X / P. Cairo 58092, 2 rt.</td>
<td>D. 20</td>
<td>legal record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pfr mw, will with property for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Bulaq X vs.</td>
<td>D. 20</td>
<td>inheritance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tito t s-gz Fr hnu n Mnu-p-p-bpy... hu 154, 5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. DeM 26 B P. Turin 2070 / 154, 5-6, col. II, vs.</td>
<td>D. 20, RVII</td>
<td>legal record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hnu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: (cont.)
Very rarely is payment listed for private sector craft work in the tomb journal, but P. Turin 1906 is one such record. In most cases recording crewmen’s craft work in the tomb journal, it is unclear whether the men were reimbursed in any way beyond their official salaries for their craft work, or if their work was simply considered one of the official tasks of the crew. The purpose of the tomb journal was to document who was working on what, where they were working, and when the work was completed. It was never intended to record private commercial exchange. Nevertheless, some Deir el Medina specialists, including Evgeni Bogoslovsky87 and Jac Janssen,88

88 Janssen, “Absence from Work by the Necropolis Workmen of Thebes.”
maintain that work in the tombs of high Theban officials was
tantamount to institutionalized and accepted exploitation, because
some recorded instances of non-royal tomb work, such as that in
O. Cairo 25243 discussed above (and see Table 2), record no details
of payment.

However, the west Theban documentation itself provides many
clues that suggest these men were given some kind of additional
recompense for this labor, beyond their monthly wages. First one
must remember that the documents upon which these assertions of
exploitation are based are tomb journals, a particular genre of text
whose function is not to record the private transfer of money, but
rather to document the organization of work, most commonly official
work. The prices themselves were only recorded when an object
was actually sold and a receipt was drawn up, a genre of text whose
main purpose was to record the transfer of wealth. Four receipts
discussed above (O. Ashmolean HO 183, O. Turin 57378, O. Deir
el Medina 198, O. Deir el Medina 215) do in fact provide prices
for decoration work in private tomb chapels or burial chambers,
thus proving that Deir el Medina workmen could be paid for tomb
work ranging from inexpensive to costly. One tomb journal docu-
ment (P. Turin 1906) even includes payment for non-royal work,
despite being a record in the official tomb journal. Finally, a much
larger body of texts, including receipts, workshop records, letters,
legal texts, and tomb journal records, document other types of
funerary art, in particular coffins, and this documentation strongly
suggests that these men were paid for private sector work by Theban
officials in an informal workshop system that functioned alongside
the formal royal workshop organization.89

The Informal Workshop and Coffin Production for the Private Sector

A large body of documentation from Western Thebes records pri-
ivate sector production of coffins and other funerary goods for which
the workmen were clearly paid, indicating that craftsmen could
work within a private sector market for which there was regional
demand.90 For example, in the mid Twentieth Dynasty text O. Berlin

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232-55.
90 Cooney, *Value of Private Funerary Art*, 249-56.
In this workshop record, the crewman Bakenwerner performs both painting and carpentry. On the recto he paints a number of objects, and on the verso he does carpentry-work specifically for the draftsman Horisheri. This text does not document Bakenwerner’s carpentry and painting-work on the same object from start to finish, but rather his decoration work or carpentry-work on several different objects. He was laboring within the context of something larger—a loosely organized cooperation in which specialized non-royal commissions were distributed among artisans attached to a royal workshop. This text is just one of many that suggest it actually was unusual for a craftsman to create funerary objects from start to finish. For example, twelve workshop records document only the decoration of *wt* coffins, providing indirect evidence that other individuals initially constructed these objects. Other workshop records

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93 *m nb t*, “in Thebes.” See McDowell, *Village Life*, 82.
point to artisans performing only carving work on the *wt* coffin, selling or trading the object without decoration. The same separation of labor exists for the *wt št* outer coffin, *wt štš* inner coffin, *sukšt* mummy board, and other funerary objects, like the *ytd* mummy board. In this informal and private sector workshop, it was unusual for one artisan to construct and decorate the same coffin, even when he was certainly capable of it, because he was part of something larger – a collective group of artisans that provided a variety of skills as well as capital for materials.

The mid Twentieth Dynasty workshop record O. Ashmolean HO 11996 also shows that artisans separated the kinds of labor they would perform in their private sector craft work:

The work which *Imn-nht son of *Rš*-ptr.f did for me: wood: 1 *mšr* furniture object making 15 (dbn), 1 *tbt* box making 10 (dbn). I gave to him decoration of the 2 *wt* coffins making 20 (dbn) and 2 smooth *mšs* shirts making 10 (dbn).

This workshop record documents a simple trade or barter between craftsmen, one of whom decorates coffins and the other who constructs wooden objects. An unnamed man, possibly a draftsman, made a record in first person that Amennakht did some work for him, ostensibly carpentry work on a piece of *mšr* furniture and a *tbt* box worth 25 total *dbn*. Amennakht is paid for the “work” (bk) on these objects, but not for the objects themselves. In exchange for this work the unnamed draftsman decorated 2 *wt* coffins for 20 *dbn* and then added 2 *mšs* shirts to the exchange for 10 *dbn*, providing a total of 30 *dbn*, which is 5 *dbn* more than the work done by the carpenter. One might assume that the *tbt* box and *mšr* furniture piece were meant to be decorated by the draftsman, perhaps to sell later. Many other, similar workshop records reveal that carpenters and draftsmen traded goods and services with each other, rather than construct one piece from start to finish.

Furthermore, a number of receipts, such as the Twentieth Dynasty O. Turin 57368, indicate that funerary items made in this informal workshop were often ultimately sold by high ranking Deir el Medina officials:

95 See O. Gardiner 105, rt., O.IFAO 1017, rt., O. Petrie 17.
List of the wealth which the scribe of the tomb Hori gave: 1 set coffin of tamarisk wood (by) making 80 (dbn), the decoration and that which was varnished making 65 copper dbn, a sukh mummy board [...] making 20 (dbn). Receiving from him: another ox making 100 (dbn). Receiving from him: another ox making 100(?), 1 smooth dryt cloak making 20 (dbn), making 43 (dbn), a smooth 1 ft sheet making 8 (dbn), the sukh mummy board making 15 (dbn).

Verso:
[...] a smooth 1 ft sheet[...] 1 thin 1 dag kerchief (?) [making] 9 dbn (?)

High ranking Deir el Medina officials, such as scribes of the tomb, are never documented in workshop records as having performed any carpentry work, yet here we see the scribe Hori selling a finished and expensive coffin set in exchange for a variety of commodities. He was most likely selling an item which he did not make himself, but whose construction and decoration he organized.

The Informal Workshop and Private Tomb Production

Given the context of this private sector “informal workshop” – which functioned parallel to the state sector formal workshop – if one examines the tomb journal texts documenting private tomb work in conjunction with the few receipts we have for private tomb decoration, then it is possible to make a circumstantial argument that crew leaders organized tomb commissions for highly placed patrons – such as the mayor of Thebes or the high priest of Amen – and that workmen were compensated for this private sector activity in some way. Payment and price information were not usually recorded in tomb journal entries, but rather in receipts and workshop records. Therefore, the argument that private tomb production in Western Thebes fits into a market economy driven by social demand (rather than exploitation) rests not only on the type of text, i.e. genre, but also on the entire body of Ramesside textual material relating to funerary craft production. Rather than documenting “exploitation,” it seems much more plausible that overseers carefully documented non-official craft activity in the tomb journal in

98 That is, the commodities received from the buyer of the coffin.
100 For more on text type or genre in the west Theban documentation, see Cooney, The Cost of Death, chapter 3.
order to ensure that the responsible craft workers were carefully listed for future payment.

This does not mean that crew leaders never exploited their workers or that this informal workshop system was fair, especially as it pertained to private tomb construction. For example, Ostracon Cairo 25521 records work by the crew in the tomb of the notorious foreman Paneb, for which they were probably not paid any extra wages, given the litigation that plagued Paneb for abusing his position. Actually, the accusatory texts in Papyrus Salt documenting the foreman Paneb’s illegitimate use of the work force for his own gain represents some of the strongest evidence disproving the notion that workmen were not paid in some way for private sector labor. The traditional interpretation of these tomb journal texts and worker payments, however, is quite different from that forwarded here. For example, with regard to Paneb’s worker exploitation, Andrea McDowell states, “this was no more than other foremen did; perhaps it was not strictly ethical but it was common practice.” She cites Janssen, who uses O. Cairo 25516 and O. Cairo 25517 to claim that the foreman Hay also used his workers for his own private gain.

A closer look at the tomb journal text O. Cairo 25517 shows that the record simply documents absences and reasons for absences. An excerpt from the verso (lines 9-11) reads:

\[ R^\text{-}ebn \text{ sick, } K^\text{-}st, \ S^\text{-}R^\text{ sick, } \text{'Ipuy was making the tomb } (\text{}} \text{). Those who are absent with the chief of the crew } H^\text{y, } Hnws-\text{st} \text{ and } S^\text{-script making the } nwt \text{ statue } (\text{}} \text{)} \text{ the } (\text{}} \text{)} \text{ was making the tomb } (\text{}} \text{). \]

This text is by no means a clear testament to worker exploitation within a strict state-run economy. In the first section, it is unclear if Ipuwy was given time off to work on his own tomb, or if the tomb belonged to a superior or Theban official. He is listed with individuals who are sick, and who are thus not reporting for official

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102 P. Salt, rt. 2, 10-12, 19-20. Černý, “Papyrus Salt 124.”
103 McDowell, Jurisdiction in the Workmen’s Community, 210.
104 Janssen, Commodity Prices, 536.
duty. This man is still actively performing craft work, but because he appears on the absence list, we must assume that he is working informally, and not in official capacity. The next lines indicate that some of the crew are making statues and working in a tomb, maybe for a superior since they are specifically said to be with their foreman Hay. Nonetheless, there is insufficient information here to assume that the foreman Hay is actually exploiting his workers for his own gain; they are only said to be “with” him doing craft work. Although no payment is listed in these texts, this would not have been the place for it. The tomb journal keeps track of craftsmen, locations, and work activities, not of commercial exchanges. In fact, I argue that the names of these men who worked on these private graves were carefully recorded in tomb journals because they were part of an informal workshop organized by their superiors. The details of subsequent payment would only have been listed in a receipt and/or workshop record, not in a tomb journal text such as this.

The other tomb journal text marshaled by proponents of the exploitation model – O. Cairo 25516 vs. 26-27106 – also documents absences of Deir el Medina craftworkers and reads:

Month 4 of prt, day 6. St-wrȝpt absent making a hdmw box for Ḥy. Ḥmwt-ši absent making a ttw statue for Ḥy.

Again, although no payment is mentioned in this journal text, this absence by no means proves that these men went unpaid for the work, because a journal text is not the appropriate place to list such payment. The men are indeed said to do craft work “for” the foreman Hay, but given other textual information found in workshop records and receipts, one could also assume that he was leading commissions in the informal workshop, and that these workmen would receive remuneration later. They are said to be “absent” (wsf) while doing these commissions, clearly indicating that they were not working in official capacity. Read within the context of the informal workshop, this text documents that workmen could actually be relieved of official duties in order to perform private sector labor.

In conclusion, public sector work in the royal tomb is relatively easy to understand, as it is possible to identify wages, interpret strict organizational systems, and understand a clear hierarchy of decision making. Private sector craft work, on the other hand, is loosely organized and thus not as obvious in the textual material because a number of different individuals are keeping track of work in various ways: in workshop records, tomb journal entries and receipts, all within the context of an informal workshop that functioned alongside the formal royal tomb organization. Nonetheless, evidence of payment for private sector craft production and tomb creation is not absent, nor is it difficult to find. One must simply examine the genre of a given socioeconomic text and place that evidence contextually within the entire body of west Theban textual material.

I oppose redistributive, substantivist, or primitivist interpretations that claim Deir el Medina workers’ monthly wages were rarely supplemented by profits from work in private tombs. Instead, examining the entire body of socioeconomic data concerning tomb goods production and interpreting these texts according to their type, I propose that a private sector market for funerary goods existed within the Theban region and that it was driven by the demands of highly placed Theban officials as well as by the Deir el Medina craftsmen themselves.

References


