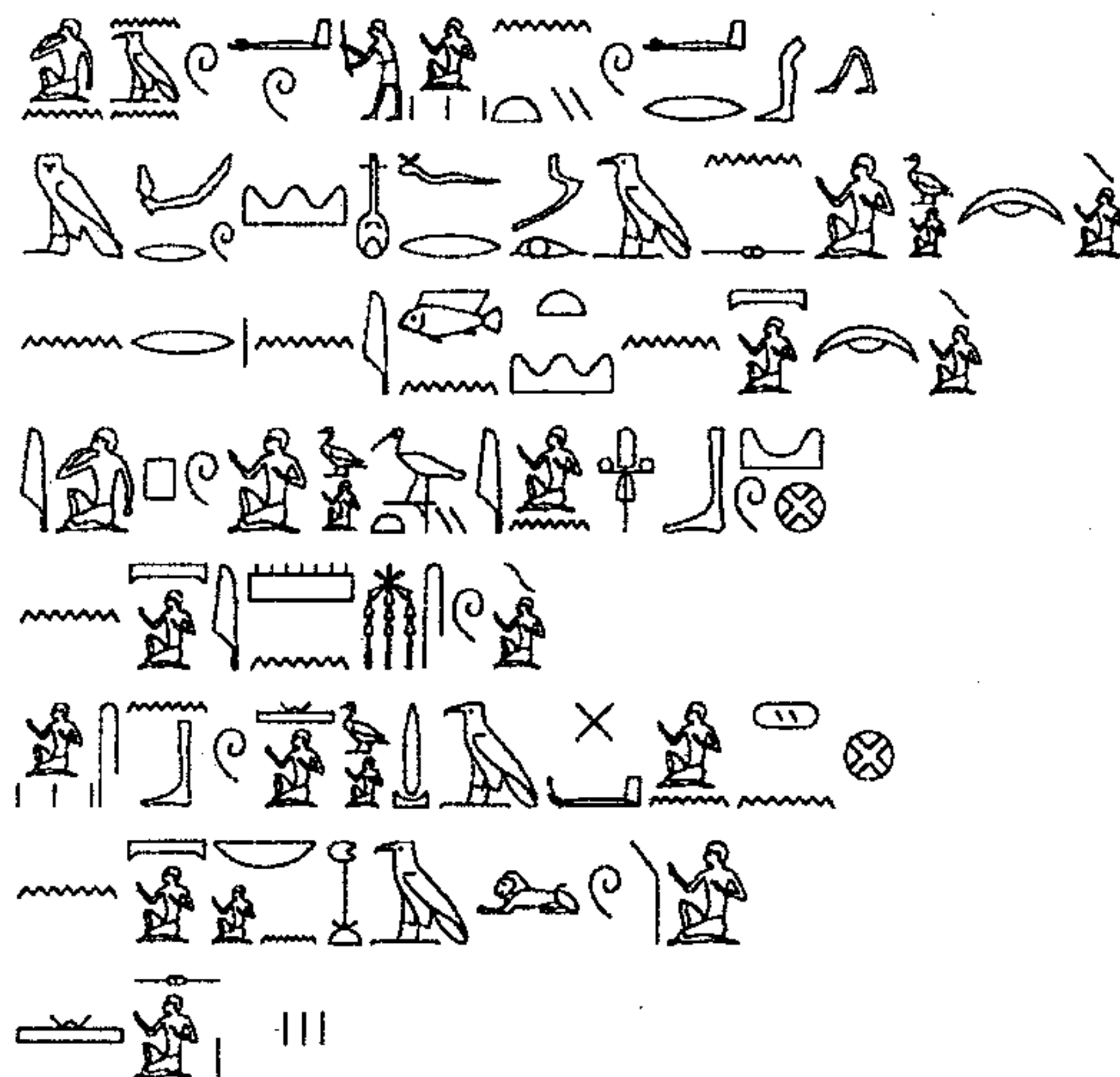


OSKAR TYCIŃSKI

# Three Labour-Conscripts from a Deir el-Bahari Ostrakon (F 2469, ro.)


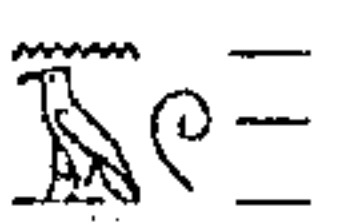
The ostrakon in question has been already published in 1983 by Dr. Marek Marciniak. It needs, however, a thorough consideration.



The introductory formula reads *sh3 n*, “reminder”, “note”, or “memorandum concerning(?)”<sup>1</sup>, not “une liste”.<sup>2</sup> There is also no appropriate reason for adopting

<sup>1</sup> T. E. Peet, *Tomb Robberies*, p. 185; A. H. Gardiner, *JEA* 27 (1941), 60, n. 2; J. Černý in: *Studies Griffith*, p. 49, n. 1; and also S. Allam’s translation of the O. Berlin P. 12630 and P. BM 10055: “Mahnung”, “Erinnerung” in: *Hieratische Ostraka und Papyri aus der Ramsesidenzeit*, Tübingen 1973, pp. 35, n. 1 and 285, n. 34; M. Megally, *Notions de comptabilité, à propos du papyrus E. 3226 du Louvre*, Bd’É 71, Le Caire 1977 where full references are to be found.

<sup>2</sup> M. Marciniak, *ET* 13 (1983), p. 254.

the view of the Dr. Marciniak who recognized the group  as  reading thus the noun as *nhtw*, "les [hommes] forts" instead of more probable *w<sup>c</sup>w*, "infantrymen".<sup>3</sup> Words beginning the sixth line should be read *Rehusonbe*, *rh<sup>w</sup>-snb* not "le troisième (homme) [étant] Senebou".<sup>4</sup>

The essential problem, however, lies in the meaning to be assigned to the verb *w<sup>c</sup>r* and the status of our three infantrymen as freemen, men impressed for forced labour (corvees) or soldiers on active service to be deduced therefrom. One should perhaps immediately reject the idea that they belong to the squads of the army which were employed at the public building programmes.<sup>5</sup> First of all, the text specifies each of the infantrymen's overseers who at the same time happen to be "foremen", *hry*.<sup>6</sup> Besides, the ostrakon from Deir el-Bahari enumerates four "infantrymen," *w<sup>c</sup>w* together with ten sawyers and eight fishers and fowlers.<sup>7</sup> In favor of the first view the absence of any section which refers to the punishment for the offences they have committed can be cited: nor do we come across any reference of a person or bureaus issuing the note, or the administrative bodies three individuals were at disposition of during the time being submissive fulfilment of their obligations. To support these considerations comes the most convincing judgment of W. C. Hayes: "the verb *w<sup>c</sup>r* seems to be used more often then not in the sense of "escaping," or "fleeing out" some places, and especially "fleeing (country)," or "emigrating" through fear or some other compulsion (...) there is nothing inherent in the verb itself which, as *tš<sup>i</sup>*, suggests the abandonment of an obligation".<sup>8</sup> To express this notion in Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446 after *w<sup>c</sup>r* the phrase "without performing his tasks," *nn irt hnt.f* (ro., 63) or "(from) the prison" (ro., lines 1, 3, 14, 25-54) or finally "(from) the great prison" (ro., 15) has to be added. Referring to Hayes' opinion, *tš<sup>i</sup>* always seems to mean "to desert," "to abandon," "to be missing" when the sense of duty makes one to show loyalty and conscientiousness.<sup>9</sup> In Papyrus Lansing (10,7), where this word is used for the "desertion" of an infantryman from the army, the above statement does not appear to be untrue. Thus one may consider the text as an announcement concerning escapees from the task who would not be prosecuted for deliberate and illegal abandonment of the labour required from the corvees. However, it

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 253 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Ranke, *PN*, p. 225.

<sup>5</sup> See P. Leiden 348, vol. 6, 1-7, 1; P. Turin B, vol. 2, 4-3, 5; Silsileh Stela of Seti I, LD text IV, 98.

<sup>6</sup> A. R. Schulman, *Military Rank, Title and Organization in the New Kingdom*, Berlin 1964 (MAS 6), pp. 83-4, 86 et passim.

<sup>7</sup> W. C. Hayes, *Ostraka and Name Stones from the Tomb of Sen-Mut (No. 71) at Thebes*, New York 1942, pp. 24, and 32, pl. 17 (No. 86).

<sup>8</sup> *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*, Brooklyn 1955, pp. 48-49, notes 197-200.

<sup>9</sup> *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom*, pp. 48-49, notes 188-196.



can be somehow suspected, though not being stated, that our three men had been drafted as statute-labourers by authorized government agencies. Corvees in Pharaonic Egypt could be drawn from people of many callings and various walks of life,<sup>10</sup> including apparently also retired soldiers or soldiers holding a reserve status. In Papyrus Anastasi VI (2, 2) we read about an "infantryman," *w<sup>c</sup>w* of the ship who was seized and sent to the prison in the village of *Tbnt*, but forced while being there to plough public fields in charge of an army scribe; further in Papyrus Bologna 1 (2-3) about an aged "infantryman," *w<sup>c</sup>w* has been assigned to be a field-hand.<sup>11</sup> The fact that labour force for building operations carried out in Djoseru was partly derived from men impressed for the corvee is reflected by three ostraka from Deir el-Bahari wherein we get to know of "statute-labourers," *bh*<sup>12</sup> or men from the list, or "numbering," *tnwt* drawn from national conscription of labourers contributed by various institutions, individuals and towns to the construction of the Hatshepsut's temple.<sup>13</sup>

The text itself furnishes us with the most telling argument that the desperate attempt in order to abandon the government-imposed duties which have sprung up in the mind of three infantrymen changed their status to that of "escapees" against whom the law is to be enforced. Namely, we find the fugitives' names accompanied by the names of their parents. After that, we identify them by the names of towns or villages they were the residents of. As further means of identification the rank and the names of the officials in charge of them while being employed in Djoseru are also entered. The latest news that they have desperately adopted the intention of fleeing the assigned duty is given in the heading together with their titles. The absence of any section which refers to the punishment may be assessed as the greatest disappointment of the text or as its advantage, for the official issuing the notification concerning the escapees could have had no authority of an originator of the directives against the offenders. Since the wilful evasion of government-imposed labour obligations was a criminal offence the appropriate procedure was of great scrupulosity and usual punishment in cases of this type very cruel. Such a profusion of data appears to be at variance with other employee lists known from Deir el-Bahari ostraka and elsewhere. Whereas, it strikes us immensely that the types and the sequence of those pieces of information fit perfectly into entries a-c of the criminal register from the main text on the recto of the Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446. Here we have a tabulated record of dozens cases to fall under five different titles of the Egyptian law pertaining

<sup>10</sup> See Kadesh Poem, pars 182-183; P. Harris I, 78, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> The prominent institution of corvee has been investigated to some extent by W. C. Hayes in *Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom* (pp. 130-133, notes 465-473), though it needs a thorough study, it will be not discussed here any further.

<sup>12</sup> W. C. Hayes, *Ostraka*, pp. 22, 34, pl. 14 (No. 69, 1); O. Berlin 10615 (P. Berlin III, pl. 30); Hayes, *JEA* 46 (1960), 31, n. 1, pl. 9 (No. 2, 1).

<sup>13</sup> Hayes, *JEA* 46 (1960), 34, n. 3, pl. 10 (No. 6).

to the abandonment of government-imposed duties.<sup>14</sup> First, text comprises list of absconding labourers registered for statute labour (Entries a-c); second, copies of government directives issued to the Great Prison at Thebes containing the titles of laws pertaining to these offenders (Entries d); and, third, notations recording execution of these instructions and the conclusion of the cases involved (Entries e-g). The names of criminals and other relevant informations regarding them from entries a-c were probably sent to the Great Prison immediately upon the discovery of their absence.<sup>15</sup> It is not baseless to make conjecture that the “message”, *sh3* of our ostrakon was send on to such an institution and its data arranged in sections of such a register. That both documents have something in common reveals suggestively when one supposes that our runaway labourers escaped for good and were never caught and sentenced for their reckless step in which case the appropriate slots in the “e”, “f”, and “g”, and perhaps “d” columns would have never been filled. In Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446 notation having to do with the capture of Dedusobek (line 58), endorsement by the scribe of the vizier closing the case against him and the symbol “completed” were never inserted while the sentence of the government résumé in the Entry “d” is not invoked against Dedusobek himself who evidently was not captured at all.<sup>16</sup>

I truthfully wanted to debate all these problems with M. Marciniak, but with his much regretted death he has left me in the lurch.

---

<sup>14</sup> Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.