Controlling Workforces at the Palace
Some Perspectives on Administrative Practice at Kom Medinet Gurob
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Controlling Workforces at the Palace: Some Perspectives on Administrative Practice at Kom Medinet Gurob

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Abstract

There are few institutional archives extant from ancient Egypt, which makes even rather fragmentary examples important for the modelling of both scribal practices and broader questions of socio-economic structures. This paper presents some key documents, both published and unpublished, from Petrie’s excavations at Kom Medinet Gurob, where he found parts of a palace archive. The focus is on administrative practice, particularly as regards the organization and control of workforces, as well as on contextualising the documents in view of the patchy record of New Kingdom institutional management.

Keywords: Administration; Archives; Duality; Kom Medinet Gurob; Workforce

1. Introduction

There has been much discussion in Egyptology regarding both the nature and extent of the Egyptian state. Broadly speaking one can place most voices in the debate on a scale between two extremes: from an understanding of the Egyptian state as all-pervasive and all-powerful, to an understanding of the state as rather small, with little permanent presence in most parts of Egyptian culture and geography. Presumably few scholars would be comfortable at either end of this scale, but there is also no clear consensus on a specific middle position. The reason for this is, to no small degree, to be found in the extremely patchy record available to us. The scale of state institutions, and their ability to impose their authority on specific geographical areas, certain demographic groups, or particular aspects of culture, frequently has to be reconstructed from fragmentary sources, the interpretation of which is often contested.

The literature is vast, and even an overview is beyond the scope of a single footnote: the following references are mainly restricted to works in English, and relating primarily to the New Kingdom. Some key contributions – ‘key’ here in that they exemplify a selection of the different perspectives in play – are J. C. Moreno García, The State in Ancient Egypt: Power, Challenges and Dynamics (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); B. Muhs, The Ancient Egyptian Economy, 3000-30 BCE (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); D. A. Warburton, The Fundamentals of Economics: Lessons from the Bronze Age Near East (Neuchâtel: Recherches et Publications, 2016); C. J. Eyre, The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The different chapters in the handbook volume edited by J. C. Moreno García, Ancient Egyptian Administration (Leiden: Brill, 2013) also showcase different perspectives, but to a lesser degree. My aim here is not to single out these authors for criticism, but simply to note that they differ substantially in their modelling of the Egyptian state and its economy (and, therefore, implicitly or explicitly, its scale and power). Other important voices in recent debates (and the authors above have made multiple contributions beyond the monographs mentioned) have been E. Eichler, P. Grandet, B. Haring, B. Kemp, B. Menu, R. Müller-Wollermann, and M. Römer, to name just a few: references to their work, as well as to older literature by scholars like M. Gutgesell, W. Helck, J. J. Janssen, and K. Polyani, can be found in the introduction of K. M. Cooney, The Cost of Death: The Social and Economic Value of Funerary Art in the Ramesside Period (EgUit 22 – Leiden: NINO, 2007), 8–12.
A useful analysis of the discussion, viewed through the lens of post-colonialism, is Chris Eyre’s ‘The Colonialisation of Pharaonic Egypt: The modernisation of order in Egyptian administration’, where he argues that:

The ideals of European colonising regimes have provided a model for filling out the apparently defective evidence base from Egypt, in order to create a vision of ancient administration... [based on] an ideology of efficiency rooted in a cultural value judgment, and in the imposition of Eurocentric and universalising expectations of cultural evolution, which seek to write history in the false frame of a social-Darwinist conceptualisation of developmental theories about the origins of the state, and about the behaviour and working of the ancient state.

It seems clear that the ‘apparently’ defective evidence base is precisely that: it is very fragmentary, survives extremely unevenly, and can be frustratingly difficult to interpret. Part of the reason for the difference of opinion among scholars – but by no means the only part – can surely be traced back to the fact that the surviving material is open to different interpretations because of its fragmentary nature. An awareness of the blind spots of the archaeological record, that is to say the kind of sources that we are lacking, provides a useful warning against being too dogmatic in favour of any model: as Eyre notes, ‘In the absence of any sort of administrative archive in the archaeological record, and of any extended narrative description of the use of public record, there can be no givens’. This characterisation of the archaeological record is broadly true, but with some important exceptions. While it is true that there are few extensive archives from ancient Egypt, there are institutional collections of archival material that do much to shed light on both archival practice generally, as well as on the operations of the institutions to which they belong. As always, there are issues of interpretation (who wrote the documents, for what purpose and for whom, are they representative, etc.), but they contribute substantially to the debate and deserve to be taken seriously as remnants of archives. The material from Gurob is a case in point, and although my work on this is far from completed, I take this opportunity to present one case study of how this might be done in practice. My argument rests partly on direct evidence, and partly on – effectively – reading between the lines, both of which require acts of interpretation.

2. The Gurob palace archive: archaeological context and research history

The papyrus fragments from Gurob were excavated by Sir W. M. Flinders Petrie in 1889, and a small handful of examples were then promptly published, along with documents from Lahun, by F. Ll. Griffith, nine years later. Some years after this Sir Alan H. Gardiner transcribed a number of the fragments to train himself in Ramesside administrative hieratic, before tackling the 10-metres long and extremely cursive Wilbour Papyrus, and a selection of these were duly published in his Ramesside Administrative Documents. Many of the papyri in that volume were also translated by him in an article, but notably not the Gurob documents.

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2 I am grateful to Chris Eyre for having shared a preliminary version of his article with me; it will be published in the proceedings volume of the conference Filtering Decorum – Facing Reality (held in Liège in 2013).


4 W. M. F. Petrie, Kahun, Gurob, and Hawara (London: Kegan Paul, 1890), 36.


7 A. H. Gardiner, Ramesside Administrative Documents (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1948), 14–35.


The archaeological context of the papyri is not known in detail; in the excavation report, Petrie simply noted that ‘of papyri a few were found, but none in such fine state as those of Kahun. The only royal name is that of Ramessu II. None of the roles were sealed, and many were crushed up as waste paper’. They were presumably mainly found somewhere within the palace enclosure, and based on internal evidence it is clear that the administrative papyri are the remains of the archive of the institution pr-ḥnrt n Mrwr, ‘the Ḥnrt-palace of Gurob’.

Today the papyri are divided between the Petrie Museum and the British Museum, with the latter having received them from Gardiner, after Petrie had assigned their publication to him.

The management of workforces: a name-list and its implications

In this section I briefly present an unpublished document from the palace, and try to contextualise it both in terms of the archive itself, as well as in relation to New Kingdom administrative practice more broadly.

The papyrus in question is BM EA 10776 [Figures 1–4], a relatively well-preserved document, which originally would, in all likelihood, have been associated with the palace day-book. At 30 x 18cm it is shorter than the full height of the day-book roll itself (which is 42cm in height), but local scribes appear to have simply appended name lists to (or filed them with) the day-book roll, rather than copy long lists of personal names into it, so the discrepancy in height does not suggest a different archival context. It is essentially a name-list, a category of document well-attested among Ramesside administrative documents, but its state of preservation and the way it is laid out provides welcome information about both the organisation of workforces at the palace, and scribal practices there. Although it is unpublished, Gardiner had transcribed it in his notebooks, initially as part of his work for the Wörterbuch, and it was mentioned in passing by both Helck in his Wirtschaftsgeschichte, and Ranke in his Personennamen.

10 Petrie, Kahun, Gurob, and Hawara, 36. A more detailed discussion of the archaeological context, including data from Petrie’s field-journal, will be found in the final publication of the papyri (in preparation), but the only probable identification of fragments mentioned there are some pieces found in a tomb (no. 267) which may correspond to P. UC 32801, a short Book of the Dead manuscript, perhaps of the Third Intermediate Period. See also the discussion in S. Quirke and F. Hagen, ‘New Kingdom Hieratic in the UCL Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology: Collection-level summary, and a preliminary report on the Gurob papyri’, in A. Fanciulli et al. (eds), New Kingdom Hieratic Collections around the World (Aegyptiaca Leodiensia – Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, forthcoming) and the remarks on the work of Petrie at Gurob in B. J. Kemp, ‘The Harim-Palace at Medinet el-Ghurabi’, ZÄS 105 (1978), 124–126; M. Serpico, ‘Gurob’, in J. Picton and I. Pridden (eds), Unseen Images: Archive Photographs in the Petrie Museum (London: Golden House Publications, 2008), 20–23.

11 The key term is consistently spelled Ḥnty in the Gurob papyri, but this is simply a different way to represent the phonetic value of the word (Wb. 3, 297). The origin and meaning of the term Ḥnt is debated: see E. Reiser, Der königliche Harim im alten Ägypten und seine Verwaltung (Vienna: Notring, 1972); D. Nord, ‘The Term chener: “Harem” or “Musical Performers”?’,” in W. K. Simpson (ed.), Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegyptische Leodiensia – Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, forthcoming) and the remarks on the work of Petrie at Gurob in B. J. Kemp, ‘The Harim-Palace at Medinet el-Ghurabi’, ZÄS 105 (1978), 124–126; M. Serpico, ‘Gurob’, in J. Picton and I. Pridden (eds), Unseen Images: Archive Photographs in the Petrie Museum (London: Golden House Publications, 2008), 20–23. Whatever the precise nuance of the term might be, the traditional translation “harem” seems misleading to me given both the modern popular understanding of the word and its specific historical meaning in relation to Ottoman palaces. As applied to the Gurob palace it clearly indicates a royal residence where parts of the royal family – of both sexes – lived, and I am not aware of any evidence suggesting that the palace was “harem”-like in the sense of implying a segregation of gender; the existence of a certain level of control over access to the royal family is a given in most monarchies, and not enough to label their residence a “harem”.

12 For the history of the papyri, see Gardiner, RAD, viii–ix. Those in the Petrie Museum are identified by the inventory numbers beginning ‘UC’, and those in the British Museum with number beginning ‘BM EA’.

13 The full height is demonstrated by P. UC 32784 = P. Gurob III (Griffith, Hieratic Papyri, 1, 94–98, II, pls. 39–40). For the practice of omitting the name-list proper from the day-book, see recto 2:10: “Copy of the (list of) every servant who is working in the pr-ḥnt in Merwer, beginning from year 2, month 3 of Akhet, day 14”, which is followed by a short blank space and then another dated entry, instead of an actual name-list; see Gardiner, RAD 15.4–5.

Figure 1. Recto of P. BM EA 10776.
Figure 2. Verso of P. BM EA 10776.
Translation of P. BM EA 10776

Notes and comments on the following translation have been kept to a minimum pending the full publication of the archive, and focus mainly on issues impacting my argument about the organisation of workforces. The layout of the original document is respected as far as possible in the presentation.
of the translation, with the exception of col. IA on the verso, which is reproduced separately for reasons of space: its original position, as seen in Figure 2, is in the margin between col. I and II.
### RECTO

**The Cultivators of this house who are for the northern region. Under the authority of:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column I</th>
<th>Column II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) [...], son of Amenemope.</td>
<td>(1) Under the authority of May:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) [...], son of Re.</td>
<td>(2) Mose, son of Khay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) [...], son of Seti.</td>
<td>(3) Sasatu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) [...], son of Penmenefer.</td>
<td>(4) Paheripedjet, son of Panakhu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Ipy, son of Tjary.</td>
<td>(5) Neferrenpet, son of Ymar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) [...], son of Seti.</td>
<td>(6) Huy, son Rema.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) [...], son of Ipy.</td>
<td>(7) Wia, son of Kaia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) [...], son of Seti.</td>
<td>(8) Peniay, son of Naarenna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) [...], son of Amenemope, son of Hady; (drafted) as soldier.</td>
<td>(9) Ptahmose, son of Ihuy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Hor, son of Duna: with May.</td>
<td>(10) May, son of Shemsunefer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) [...], son of Ipy.</td>
<td>(11) Penmehyt, son of Huy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) [...], son of Re.</td>
<td>(12) Ramose, son of Surtji.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) [...], son of Tjary.</td>
<td>(13) Tuy, son of Pawah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Ramose, son of Khay.</td>
<td>(14) Niay, son of Garum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) Nakhtia, son of Sanut.</td>
<td>(15) Iryenaa, son of Neferu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) Tjuri, son of Dununa.</td>
<td>(16) Amenerhatef, son of May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Panehemu, son of Nuamun; (drafted) as soldier.</td>
<td>(17) Ptahemwia, son of Huy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) Ipy, son of Ipy.</td>
<td>(18) Bakienwahsu, son of Nakht.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20) Meryptah, son of Menna.</td>
<td>(20) Ahaef, son of Nebmehyt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21) Ibia, son of Hesefemiunu.</td>
<td>(21) Kar, son of Bakikai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22) [...], son of Amenemheb.</td>
<td>(22) Pamerihu, son of Pabai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) [...], son of Amenemheb.</td>
<td>(23) Ipy, son of Amenmose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### VERSO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column I</th>
<th>Column II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Wah, son of Ipy.</td>
<td>(1) The controller Pashedu, son of Tenen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The servant Parennefer.</td>
<td>(2) The great of fields and servant Karkar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The servant Naherhu.</td>
<td>(3) The great of fields Penra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) The servant Ramose.</td>
<td>(7) The cultivator Hori.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) The servant [...],teri.</td>
<td>(9) The guard Panehem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) The servant Sethi.</td>
<td>(10) The washerman Pahu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fredrik Hagen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Column I)</th>
<th>(Column II)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(12) The guard (?) [...jay.</td>
<td>(12) The servant Pashedu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) [...traces only...</td>
<td>(13) &lt;The servant?&gt; Nebpay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) [...traces only...</td>
<td>(14) The great of fields and servant Hati.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) [...traces only...</td>
<td>(15) The great of fields and servant Tusa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) [...traces only...</td>
<td>(16) TOTAL: Controller of grain: 1 man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) [...traces only...</td>
<td>(17) Great of fields: 5 men; 6 in all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) [...]mose.</td>
<td>(18) LISTING OF THEM: The controller Pashedu, son of Tenen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19) [...traces only...</td>
<td>(19) The great of fields Karkar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20) [...]kary.</td>
<td>(20) The great of fields Penra[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22) [...] 2 men.</td>
<td>(22) The great of fields Tusa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) The great of fields Pashedu, son of Raia[...]</td>
<td>(23) The great of fields Pashedu, son of Raia[...]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24) TOTAL: Cultivators: 30 men</td>
<td>(25) TOTAL (ALTOGETHER): 37 men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Column IA)

(1) Total: 22 men
(2) Remaining: 14 men
(3) Absent, those <in> the East: 2 men.
(4) Dead: 2
(5) Escaped: 1 man
(6) Drafted as soldiers: 3 men

Notes and comments

The document is a name-list providing data on individuals from the palace (“this house”) who were sent out to “the northern region” for some unspecified work. It is divided into two columns on both the front and the back, which should be understood to be read continuously, i.e. col. 1 on the front continues as col. I on the back, as the scribe simply turned the papyrus over on the horizontal axis when he reached the bottom of the page. The continuity is confirmed by the additions made at the bottom of both columns on the back. Upon turning the page, the scribe (probably a single individual as the hand seems identical on both sides) not only continued his list, but he also changed the way in which he identified the individual workers. On the front he had listed everyone by name and filiation (‘X son of Y’), whereas on the back, with the exception of the first individual in both columns, he decided to list people by title instead (‘the servant NN’).

At the head of each column is the name of the individual under whose authority the groups of workers are organised: col. I has only the final signs of the name preserved ([…]suy), whereas col. II has the name “May”. Neither of these are identified by title or filiation; they may have been well-known to the scribe and the palace administration and so did not require further identification, or they may have been less important for the purpose of record-keeping, for example if the focus was on the workers themselves (see below).

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At one point the scribe added a preliminary calculation in the margin between the two columns on the back (verso IA), which relates to the workers listed in recto I. This calculation starts by adding the individuals listed in recto I, which yields the number 22. However, this initial list was clearly an ideal in that it deals with people assigned to the work, not all of whom could take part. Fourteen of them did show up, but eight did not: these are identified as such on the verso itself, in some cases, by the addition of various phrases after their names. Three were “[drafted] as soldiers” (m ʿwʿw; I.3, 10 and 18), and these are described as “put to soldiering” on the verso (dd <m?> wʿw; verso IA.6). Two are simply said to be “with” other individuals (m-ʿ NN; I.11, 15), and these presumably correspond to those said to be ‘absent, those in the East’ on the verso (wsf ni <m?> ʿibtt; verso IA.3). The remaining absentees – the two individuals who are said to be “dead” (mwt; verso IA.4) and one who had “fled” (wʿr; verso IA.5) – are not readily identified on the recto; presumably the missing check-marks in the right-hand margin would have indicated which ones were meant. The mention of someone having “fled” probably suggests that whatever agricultural task these people were recruited for may have been some kind of forced labour, so that part of the purpose of the name-list was to keep track of fulfilment of work obligations.

The numbers given at the end of each column on the verso seem to be adding up the individuals listed above, and although these lines are partly damaged for col. I, it is clear in the tallying of numbers at the bottom that both groups of workers amounted to 37 individuals in total. In the list of names in col. II on the verso, there is a repetition of some names at the end. The initial list includes five people who, in addition to their regular title of “servant”, are also described in the margin with the phrase “great of fields” (ṣ n ḫw.w; verso II.2, 3, 8, 14, and 15; or perhaps “great of cultivators”?), seemingly added as an afterthought. It also includes an individual added later at the top of the column (“the controller <of grain>”, rwḏ <n ḫt>). These six people are all tallied in verso II.16 and 17, and their names listed again immediately underneath (verso II.18–23). Then, at the very end, the total of “cultivators” is given as 30 (verso II.24), which – when added to the five people described as “great of fields” and the “controller of grain” – is calculated (wrongly) as a grand total of 37 workers (verso II.25), the same number as in the other column (verso I.21). It is not straightforward to correlate these totals with the number of names in the document as currently preserved, but for the purposes of my focus in this article this is less important – the main point is that the workers are clearly being organised in two groups where the number of workers was calculated as 37, and both groups were “under the authority of” two separate individuals.\footnote{On the implications of this organisation, see Concluding remarks below. The problem with relating the numbers at the end of the columns (as well as the numbers between columns I and II) to the actual name-list is primarily due to the loss of a 1-cm strip at the right-hand margin of recto and verso I, which means that most of the checkmarks here are missing. The importance of these checkmarks becomes clear in recto I.10 and I.18, where the marks were made in red ink rather than the usual black; in both these cases the individual is also explicitly noted as “drafted as a soldier”. The use of red ink for the checkmarks in recto I.5 and verso I.1 then strongly suggests that these individuals were also absent, despite no descriptive text next to their names (they might be dead, or have fled, as noted in verso IA.4–5).}

Perspectives on the management of workforces

The organisation of workforces into two groups is also detectable in another document from the palace archive. P. UC 32784, which is the best-preserved page from the day-book,\footnote{Fn. 13 above; and cf. Helck, Materialien, 697.} contains a wide range of texts. The recto is dominated by a copy of a letter sent from a female administrator at the palace to the king (Seti II), dealing with the need for manpower, followed by dated daybook-entries relating to the management of workforces (an omitted name-list) and the delivery of fish from the local governor. The verso continues with dated entries dealing with similar topics, but notably also includes a long table detailing the issue of oil to workers. Frustratingly, the beginnings of the lines are missing, so that the crucial terminology employed in the headings for this transaction is not recoverable, but the
basic process is clear: different amounts of olive oil (nhh) and moringa oil (bk) are given to various individuals. Just above the table itself are a few lines explaining that its purpose is to provide details of oil issued: here the numbers show that the grand total was 130 hnw (c. 62 litres) of moringa oil and 2286.25 hnw (c. 1097 litres) of olive oil, a considerable volume. The initial columns of the table – where the headings are missing – deal with a group of only two individuals who each are issued 5 hnw of olive oil, and 5 hnw of moringa oil. Griffith suggested, no doubt correctly, that these two men would have been some kind of overseers or foremen. The remaining columns deal with the “men of the palace” who are each issued 2.5 hnw of olive oil. In terms of olive oil these workers are, in other words, paid only half of what the overseers received, which is the same proportional relationship seen in much of the documentation from Deir el-Medina, where the ‘foremen’ or ‘captains’ (ḥry iswt, hn.tiw) are normally paid twice as much oil as ‘workmen’ (rmt n iswt). However, at Gurob the overseers also received an additional amount of moringa oil which the workers do not get, so in practice they get four times as much oil (which might represent a much higher value because there are no recorded prices of moringa oil).

There are several aspects of the table that remain uncertain. The precise range of time covered, for example, is unknown: Griffith suggested that the fifteen lines of the table itself “relate to fifteen days, or half a month”, whereas Helck suggested that each line should be interpreted as a week (i.e. ten days). There is also some confusion in the interpretation of lines I.14 and I.16 where the calculations do not match the number of overseers – either the total of oil is wrong, or there was in fact two and not one overseer present in those cases, despite the information in the personnel column. However, it leaves little doubt that “men of the palace” were being rewarded for unspecified work and, significantly for my argument, that they were divided into two groups under two overseers. These two groups vary in size: over the fourteen lines the mean is 61 men, and the median is 67.5, which is suggestive given the 74

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18 The precise nature of nhh oil is much debated, with olive oil or sesame oil the most probable alternatives, but it may also simply be a generic term for vegetable oil (as opposed to oil or fat from animals), rather than a specific type of oil; see M. Müller, ‘Es werde Licht? Eine kurze Geschichte von Öl und Fett in Deir el-Medina in der 20. Dynastie’, in B. J. J. Haring, O. E. Kaper and R. van Walsum (eds), The Workman’s Progress: Studies in the Village of Deir el-Medina and Other Documents from Western Thebes in Honour of Rob Demarée (Leiden: NINO, 2014), 180–81.

19 Gardiner, RAD, 16–17. One hnw amounts to c. 0.48 litres. The ‘half’ man recorded in I.14 is probably, as Griffith suggested, a boy who was paid less, as we know from other records of reimbursement of work: J. J. Janssen, ‘Rations and Rank’, in J. J. Janssen (ed.), Village Varia: Ten Studies on the History and Administration of Deir el-Medina (Egypt in NT 11 – Leiden: NINO, 1997), 19–21.

20 See Müller, ‘Es werde Licht?’, 188, where three of four sources have these proportions (the last has 16:6). To these examples add R. Demarée and D. Valbelle, Les registres de recensement du village de Deir el-Médineh (le “Stato Civile”) (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), pl. 8, where foremen are given 28 hnw of oil (šknn), and workmen 14 hnw. However, it is worth noting that the difference between foremen and workers in terms of grain wages at Deir el-Medina is much less (7.5:5.5), and as Janssen warned, administrative records are often fragmentary, scribal mistakes abound, and it is not straightforward to extract firm principles on wages from the material: see Janssen, ‘Rations and Rank’, 13–17.

21 Its absence in the Deir el-Medina material has been remarked on, with the inference that it was quite expensive: Helck, Materialien, 700.

22 Griffith, Hieratic Papryri, I, 96; Helck, Materialien, 697. Note that Griffith’s restoration of hrt-hrw (‘daily’) in the line above the table (Hieratic Papryri, I, 96), on which his interpretation of the table may have been based, is “quite impossible” given the traces (Gardiner, RAD, 15). The value of the olive oil issued to the workers (2.5 hnw) is roughly equivalent to just over one sack (ḥr = 76.88 litres) of barley or emmer; see J. J. Janssen, Commodity Prices from the Ramessid Period: An Economic Study of the Village of Necropolis Workmen at Thebes (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 119, 333. If each line in the table was for one week, this would yield a monthly issue of oil worth about three and a half sacks of grain for the “men of the palace”, which might be compared with the monthly salary of Deir el-Medina workers – normally seen as well-paid – at four sacks of emmer and one and a half sacks of barley (in addition to other commodities). Sailors were paid significantly less, with P. Amiens recording one sack of grain per month (half or three quarters for boys): see J. J. Janssen, Grain Transport in the Ramesside Period: Papyrus Baldwin (BM EA 10061) and Papyrus Amiens (HPBM 8 – London: British Museum Press, 2004), 24, 29–30, 56.

23 If the total amount of oil given in the lines above the table are correct, then there was only one overseer present in lines I.14 and I.16, and the amount in the relevant column should be “5” instead of “10” there. The final line is also odd, in that it only records two “men of the palace” and no overseers, but with no explanation.
workers in P. BM EA 10776 (there divided into two groups of 37 men). The number in the latter papyrus falls comfortably within the range attested in the table in the temple day-book, and is not too far removed from the size of the famous Deir el-Medina crew under most kings (c. 40-60). Notwithstanding the lack of contextual information about the kind of work being done at Gurob – “perhaps cultivation of land, repair of dykes, brick-making, or what not”, as Griffith suggested – the basic underlying structure of the organisation of workforces at the palace seems to have been duality.

The papyri from the palace archive also shed light on an aspect of administration that is important from a methodological perspective, but which, for reasons of space, I cannot go into in any detail here. This relates to the use and meaning of titles, and their usefulness (or otherwise) for writing social history. The ubiquity of titles in the archaeological record is a rich resource for researchers interested in the structure of Egyptian society, and it can be tempting to mine this material for databases of hierarchies, sometimes almost amounting to modern organisational charts. However, as people like Stephen Quirke have cautioned, titles – however one chooses to define them vis-à-vis epithets and ranks – cannot be used as short-hand for roles and responsibilities. P. BM EA 10776 is a case in point: here the sum in col. II line 24 specifies that the people listed above are all working as “cultivators” (ʿḥ.wtἰw) in this particular instance, despite bearing titles such as “servant”, “guard” or even “washerman”. Similarly, in a fragmentary list of people delivering large numbers of bricks to a building project “inside” the palace (?), the individuals are identified not only as “builders” but also “coppersmiths”, “sandal-makers”, and even a “guardian of the granary”; professions that one would not normally associate with brick production. Such examples suggest a complex and dynamic system of administration where titles are as much about providing an identifier as about describing areas of responsibility; one potentially fruitful way forward might then be to look at the tasks and activities of individuals, to map actual areas of practice. That is not to say that titles are irrelevant in the reconstruction of social history, but that any such reconstruction needs to acknowledge the fluidity and ad hoc nature of the underlying reality, and this is where archives and administrative documents of practice provide a useful complement to the monumental record of tomb inscriptions and stelae.

**Concluding remarks**

The palace archive from Gurob is fragmentary, but it is an important corpus for historians interested in the social and administrative history of the New Kingdom. As I hope I have shown with this short presentation of one of the unpublished documents from the site, it has the potential to shed light on
a range of different issues, not least that of the organisation of workforces. The duality evident at Gurob lends further support to the hypothesis that this was the dominant organisational model in the New Kingdom. This model is perhaps most famously attested in the ‘right’ and ‘left’ side of the crew of workers from Deir el-Medina who were responsible for building the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, but it is attested more broadly both chronologically and geographically. Mounir Megally demonstrated almost fifty years ago that the dual structure is also observable in two 18th Dynasty papyri, one dealing with date production (P. Louvre E.3226), and one recording temple traders (P. Boulaq 18), as well as in ostraca from the contemporary construction work at Deir el-Bahri, where workers are said to be “divided” (psš) into two groups “under the charge of” (nty m-⟨⟩) officials. Other explicit references to the ‘right’ or ‘left’ side of work crews have been found in connection with temple building at Abydos, where an ostracon is headed “account of the work done by the left side of the crew” (krw n smḥ), as well as from building blocks of the monument of Khaemwaset at North Saqqara during the reign of Ramesses II where individuals belonged to a ‘right’ or ‘left’ side.

The Ramesside archive at Gurob adds welcome evidence of this duality in a different social context, namely manual labour for a royal palace. Although the work is not always specified (e.g. in the case of the oil issued in P. UC 32784), the name-list of P. BM EA 10776, published here for the first time, suggests a similar division in the case of agricultural work.

Appendix: Transliteration of the text

RECTO

[... nꜢ ʿḥ.wtἰ pr pn nty iw=sn r ⟨⟩ mh.t m dr.t

(Column I) (Column II)

(1) [ ... ] swy (1) m dr.t Mʿy
(2) [ ... ] ss Ḫʿy
(3) [ ... ] m ḡy
(4) [ ... ] ḫy
(5) [ ... ] Ṯry
(6) [ ... ] Ṯry
(7) [ ... ] Ṯry
(8) [ ... ] Ṯry
(9) [ ... ] Ṯry
(10) [ ... ] Ṯry

CONTROLLING WORKFORES AT THE PALACE

(Column I)  (Column II)
(11) [...] Ḥrἰ sꜢ Dwñi m⁻ Mʿy  (11) P(⁻)-n-mḥyt sꜢ Ḥwy
(12) [...] sꜢ Rᶜ  (12) Rᶜ-ms sꜢ Sw-r-ṯi
(13) [...] Ḥrἰ sꜢ Ḥs-bꜢkw-n-f  (13) Twy sꜢ P{-wḥ
(14) ... Rᶜ-msw sꜢ Ḥy  (14) Niḥ sꜢ Gir阡
(15) ... ḫw sꜢ Inny m⁻ Msw  (15) Iry-n⁻ Nfrw.
(16) ... Nḥt-iꜢ sꜢ Sнт  (16) ḫm-r-HT-f sꜢ Mʿy
(17) ... Twr sꜢ Dw-nw-nꜢ  (17) Ptḥ-m-wiꜢ sꜢ Ḥwy
(18) ... P{-nḥmw sꜢ Nw-Imm m ṡw  (18) ḫk-n-wiꜢ-sw sꜢ Nḥt
(19) ... ḫpected ṡsꜢ Ḥsw  (19) P(⁻)-n-in-ḥr sꜢ Sṯ
(20) ... ḫm-msw sꜢ ḫm-m-ḥb  (20) ḫ¢-f sꜢ Nb-mḥyt
(21) ... ḫy-Ptḥ sꜢ Mnm  (21) Kṛ sꜢ ḫk-ki
(22) ... ḫb sꜢ Ḥs-f-m-ǐwnw  (22) P{-imy-ᵣ⁻-iḥ.w-ᵣḥw sꜢ PḇiꜢ
(23) ... ḫw sꜢ ḫm-msw  (24) ḫh-msw sꜢ ḫyr’diꜢ

VERSO

(Column I)  (Column II)
(1) ... Wĭ sꜢ ḫy  (1) ṡḏmw P{-šdw s ꢢ Tmn
(2) ṡḏmw P{-rṇ-nfr  (2)  ḫ n ḫ.wt ṡḏmw KlrkꜢr
(3) ṡḏmw NꜢ-ḥr-ḥw  (3) ḫ n ḫ.wt P(⁻)-n-Rcbc
(4) ṡḏmw P{-nḥw  (4) ḫ.wy ḫh-ḥsw
(5) ṡḏmw Msw  (5) ṡḏmw P(⁻)-n-ǐy
(6) ṡḏmw P{-šdw ṡ pr B’hw  (6) ṡḏmw ṡb-Imm
(7) ṡḏmw Rᶜ-msw  (7) ḫ.wy Ḥrἰ
(8) ṡḏmw Ṣḣk  (8) ḫ n ḫ.wt ṡḏmw P{-šdw
(9) ṡḏmw [...]tři  (9) ṡšš.ty P{-nḥm
(10) ṡḏmw Sṯ  (10) ṭḥ.ty Phw
(11) ḫ.wty ṢswiꜢ  (11) ṭḥ.ty Sbik-msw
(12) ṡšš.ty [...]ty  (12) ṡḏmw P{-šdw
(13) [...]traces only...  (13) ṡb-ᵣy
(14) [...]traces only...  (14) ḫ n ḫ.wt ṡḏmw Ḥtí
(15) [...]traces only...  (15) ḫ n ḫ.wt ṡḏmw Twśi
(16) [...]traces only...  (16) ṭm ṡḏ mw ṡ pr ṱ 1
(17) [...]traces only...  (17) ḫ n ḫ.wt ṡ b-ᵣ  ṱ 6 ṭm ṡ[...traces only...
(18) [...] Msw  (18) ṭp st ṡḏ mw P{-šdw s ꢢ Tmn
(19) [...]traces only...  (19) ḫ n ḫ.wty KlrkꜢr
(20) [...] Kṛy  (20) ṭn ḫ.wt P(⁻)-n-Rcbc
(21) [ḏm ṱ ḫ].wty ṡ 37  (21) ḫ n ḫ.w ṭ Ḥtí
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column I</th>
<th>Column II</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(22) [...] s 2</td>
<td>(22) ʿꜢ n ʿḥ.wt Tws!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) ʿꜢ n ʿḥ.wt PꜢ-šdw šꜢ RʿṣꜢ[...]</td>
<td>(24) dmḏ: ʿḥ.wty s 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25) dmḏ: s 37</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(1) dmḏ s 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) mn s 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) wsf nꜢ &lt;m&gt; iḥbt.t s 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) mwt 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) wʿr s 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) dd &lt;m&gt; wʿw: s 3</td>
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References


