

COMMENTS ON TWO TELL EL-DAB^CA SEALINGS

By Marcel Marée

Sealing 1 (TED Inv. Nr. 9441T) (Fig. 1A and B)

This sealing was found in Area R/II, where a salvage excavation revealed settlement layers dated from the late Middle Kingdom to the end of the Second Intermediate Period.¹ The sealing impression was found in L 138, which context can be dated to the later Second Intermediate Period. It names an *jmj-r ḥnrt wr Pth-m-ḥb* ‘overseer of the great *ḥnrt*, Ptahemheb’. It is unclear to what kind of object the sealing was originally attached. The reverse bears two parallel elongated imprints, in the same vertical orientation as the inscription.

The name Ptahemheb is rarely attested in sources predating the New Kingdom. I know of no other early examples, apart from one cited by Hermann Ranke, which dates from the 11th Dynasty.² The present sealing is from the 13th Dynasty, and the reference to Ptah strongly suggests that the official concerned came from the Memphite region.

Ptahemheb’s title is of considerable interest. The masculine word *ḥnrt* cannot be directly translated, but in the late Middle Kingdom it denoted a type of enclosed facility where men and women were required to spend some time doing corvée labour for the state. These **ḥnrtw* existed in various parts of the country, each supervised by an *jmj-r ḥnrt*, ‘overseer of the *ḥnrt*’. There was apparently one ‘great’ or ‘main’ *ḥnrt*, the *ḥnrt wr*, where the nationwide system of organised labour was coordinated.³ This was naturally located at the principal seat of national government, in the Memphis/Lisht/Fayum region. Presumably the item to which this sealing was attached came from there.

Until now, all known references to the *ḥnrt wr* related to secretaries employed at that institution, whose regular title was *sš n ḥnrt wr*, ‘scribe of the great *ḥnrt*’. The present sealing offers the first attestation of an *overseer* of the *ḥnrt wr*. It is possible,



1A seal impression of the overseer of the great *ḥnrt*, Ptahemheb, TED inv. no. 9441T, front



1B seal impression of the overseer of the great *ḥnrt*, Ptahemheb, TED inv. no. 9441T, back

¹ I owe this information to Irene Forstner-Müller. A preliminary report of this area is being prepared by Sandra Müller, same volume.

² RANKE 1935, 140 [2], IDEM 1952, 358 [140, 2] (a Memphite high-priest).

³ For a detailed study of the *ḥnrt* system, see S. QUIRKE 1988.



2A seal impression of the vizier Djedptah Dedetuseneb, TED inv. no. 9525V, front



2B seal impression of the vizier Djedptah Dedetuseneb, TED inv. no. 9525V, back

of course, that some of the officials referred to in sources as *jmj-r ḥnrt* were, in fact, overseers of the *ḥnrt wr*, but the Tell el-Dab'a sealing provides the first explicit evidence that the *ḥnrt wr* was headed by the same type of officials as the *ḥnrt* compounds elsewhere in the country. From this it follows that the 'scribes of the great *ḥnrt*' were assistants subordinate to the *jmj-r ḥnrt wr*.

Sealing 2 (TED Inv. Nr. 9525V) (Fig. 2A and B) This sealing was found in area R/III-r/5 Pl. 15–16, L589, which dates into the very early Second Intermediate Period.⁴ The inscription reads *jmj-r nwt ḥtj Dd-Pth Dd.tw-snb whm ḥnh*, 'the overseer of the city, the vizier Djedptah Dedetuseneb, repeating life'. The imprints on the back suggest that this sealing was once attached to a bag.

Evidently the vizier had a double name. With both names or just the first, he is known from other sources. As Djedptah, he appears in seal impressions discovered in the Nubian fortress of Uronarti.⁵ The Uronarti context suggests that he lived in the first

half of the 13th Dynasty, before the Egyptians abandoned that fortress.⁶ An actual scarab seal attests the vizier with both his names, but unfortunately its provenance is unknown.⁷ A further scarab, however, associates him with Lisht, as it was found in the cemetery at the pyramid of Amenemhat I.⁸ Like the Uronarti sealings, that scarab names him simply as Djedptah. The Lisht scarab and a third (unprovenanced) scarab,⁹ which again cites that name only, document an earlier stage of his career, before he attained the vizierate; they identify him as a *wr mdw Ṣmḥw*, 'chief of tens of Upper Egypt'. Functionaries with that title were closely involved with the bureau of the vizier,¹⁰ and Djedptah must undoubtedly be ranked among those who eventually became vizier themselves.¹¹

The name Djedptah is not attested outside the sources cited above. Again the reference to Ptah suggests that we are dealing with a person who originated from the Memphite region. His second name, Dedetuseneb, is otherwise attested only as a female name.¹²

⁴ A detailed study of the seal impressions from area R/III will be provided by Chiara Reali as a dissertation. For area R/III, see also FORSTNER-MÜLLER, ROSE, this volume, REALI, this same volume.

⁵ MARTIN 1971, 136 no. 1775, pl. 16 [2].

⁶ RYHOLT 2010, 113–117, has argued strongly that the Egyptians withdrew from Uronarti before the middle of the 13th Dynasty.

⁷ MARTIN 1971 (n. 3) 136 no. 1778, pl. 20 [33].

⁸ MARTIN 1971 (n. 3) 136 no. 1777, pl. 23 [38].

⁹ MARTIN 1971 (n. 3) 136 no. 1776, pl. 16 [5].

¹⁰ As indicated by the *Duties of the Vizier*; see VAN DEN BOORN 1988, 33–34, 324, 327, and compare the comments by QUIRKE 2004, 87.

¹¹ Officials with the post of *wr mdw Ṣmḥw* and later appointed vizier include an Amenemhat of the late Middle Kingdom (FRANKE 1984, dossier 80) and probably the famous vizier Ankhuf of the early 13th Dynasty. For Ankhuf, compare IDEM, dossier 173 (vizier) with dossier 178 (*wr mdw Ṣmḥw* and *r3 Nhn*), noting the identical mother's name; the relevant sources are closely contemporary.

¹² RANKE 1935 (n. 1) 404 [4].

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