Atypical Spelling Variants
from the Hatshepsut Temple
at Deir el-Bahari
The decorative programme of the eastern wall of the Upper Courtyard of the Hatshepsut temple at Deir el-Bahari, illustrating the ritual of the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, includes a scene depicting two butchers severing the front leg of a bull lying between them (Fig. 1). The scene is supplemented with the following text:

![Image]

The notation is entirely original, except for the name of the queen (Meryet-k3-R3), which was hammered and substituted with the epithet pn nfr.

This text is particularly worth of attention, due to the context of a scene located below it, in the lower part of the register. This scene, identical in subject to the tableau above it, is described in a conventional manner:

![Image]

Considering the identical subject of the scenes, one is puzzled by a seeming difference between the texts commenting on them, in particular – the originality of the form and content of the passage referring to the upper scene. Where in the lower inscription the term appears, in the upper scene a group of signs preceded by a vertical stroke is present (Fig. 2a). In inscriptions on the walls of the Hatshepsut temple such a stroke served to distinguish a part of text that constitutes a legend of the scene; therefore it seems logical that in this context its function should be similar and the text of the legend should be read: spd ḏs and translated: "sharpening the knife".

A possibility to be considered is that the ‘scene description’ could be treated as an element of the text, used in the genitive, which suggests the following translation: ‘(...) in this million (acts) of sharpening the knife’. However, should this concept be excluded and the term spd ḏs treated as a separate description of the scene independent from the preceding text, one should explain why the first text was not finished. If the scribe had wanted to continue the text below due to lack of space, it would have been placed immediately below the end of the line of text, as seen in other such instances on the temple walls, thus distinguishing the legend. An even more probable placement for the legend would be directly next to the figures, as it was done in one of the neighbouring scenes. In this case, however, the author was not constrained by lack of space, but on the contrary – he had enough of it to place the legend in a way that did not leave any room for doubt. It is also dissatisfactory to consider the unfinished text a scribal error.

Therefore it seems justified to return to the interpretation suggested above, that the two graphically separated texts were in fact a whole and, at the same time, to reflect on whether the version of the translation presented above is the only one. The context of the

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1 The publication of this part of the temple is in preparation by the author.

2 E. NAVILLE, The Temple of Deir el Bahari [= Deir el Bahari ] IV, London 1901, Pl. CVII.

3 Ibid., loc.cit.

4 An unpublished fragment of the northern part of the east wall.
1. Butchery scene on the eastern wall of the Upper Court (Drawing and Phot. J. Iwaszczuk).
text accompanying the lower scene suggests that the discussed phrase spd ds, which alludes to the ritual depicted on both scenes, served as a basis for graphic transpositions aimed to create visual associations with the spelling variant of the term sd, or an abbreviated notation of the name of the anniversary festival hb sd. As far as the semantic issues are concerned, the commented term from the upper text and the term hbw sd from the conventional lower text are identical. This allows one to recognize a similar formula in the upper text as in the one that accompanied the scene preserved below: [may you be well,] king Maat-Ka-Ra, in this million of (festivals of) Sed. Through the unusual exposure of the element spd ds=sd this text, which contains conventional wishes, at the same time alludes to the depicted ritual that was indispensable for the fulfilling of the expressed wish.

Notably, the above play on words is not the only one referring to the Sed festival on the walls of the Hatshepsut temple. Two equally interesting notations of the name of this festival are preserved. They seem to be all the more meaningful that in the Hatshepsut temple there are recurring mentions of hb-sd.5 There are scenes depicting the king sitting in the chapel during the anniversary ceremony. Usually, however, the festival is mentioned in the context of wishing the king millions of years of celebrating sd. In practically all instances the name of the festival was written in a traditional manner.6

In the entrance to the most important part of the temple, on the north wall on the inside of the granite gate to the sanctuary there is an inscription addressed to Amon-Ra. The text recited by Thoth, the scribe of the gods, concerns various offerings presented to Amon-Ra by the queen, ensuring her eternity (nHH) as king in millions of Sed festivals.8 Here, instead of the traditionally inserted determinative (Fig. 2b), the sign (Fig. 2b) was introduced.

The occurrence of an allusion to the goddess/idea Ma’at seems fully justified in this context. The inscriptions on both sides of the gate9 refer to the establishment of the daily ritual cultivated in the temple in honour of Amon-Ra. Thoth was the creator of the rituals and Ma’at was their ‘Law and Order’. She also symbolized any offering given to the gods, especially during the daily ritual in the temple, as well as in the funerary ritual.11

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5 NAVILLE, Deir el Bahari, London 1895–1908, Vol. I, Pls. IX, XI, XXI; Vol. II, Pls. XXXVII, XL, XLVII, LI, LIII, LV; Vol. III, Pls. LVIIa, LVIII, Lxa, LXIIb, LXIIIb, LXIVc (the king in the Sed dress), LXV, LXVI, LXXXIVb; Vol. IV, Pls. XCII, XCVIII, CV; Vol. V, Pls. CXXIV, CXXXII; Vol. VI, Pls. CLIV, CLVII (the run with the hs vase), CLXI.


7 NAVILLE, Deir el Bahari V, London 1906, Pl. CXL.

8 Ibid., p. 10.

9 The southern side of the gate: ibid., pp. 9–10 and Pl. CXXXIX.

10 H. BONNET, RÄRG, pp. 639 (Ritual), 808 (Thoth); P. BOYLAN, Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt, London 1922, pp. 88–91; W. HELCK, Thot, LÄ VI, 518 n. 138, and col. 507.

11 A. MORET, Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte, Paris 1902, p. 142 and n. 2; BONNET, RÄRG, p. 431, s.v. Maat.
2. Variants of the Sed-spelling from Hatshepsut Temple: a – from the eastern wall of the Upper Court (detail of the Fig. 1); b – on the north wall of the passage to the main Sanctuary; c – from one of the pillars of the Middle Porticoes (Drawings: J. Iwaszczuk; Photos: M. Jawornicki)

this very spot, does not appear for the first time in the Hatshepsut temple, but is also attested on buildings of Sesostris I: the temple of Amon-Ra in Karnak\textsuperscript{12} and the ‘White Chapel’\textsuperscript{13}.

\textsuperscript{12} L. Gabolde, “Le Grande Château d’Amon” de Sesostris I\textsuperscript{er} à Karnak, Paris 1998, Pls. XVIIa, XXVIIIId, XXXIIb and d.

\textsuperscript{13} Ch. Leblanc, Piliers et colosses de type « osyriaque » dans le contexte des temples de culte royal, \textit{BIFAO} 80, 1980, p. 86; P. Lacau, H. Chévrier, Une chapelle de Sesostris I\textsuperscript{er} à Karnak, Le Caire 1969, Pls. 2, 3, 10, 13, 14, 16, 20, 24–29, 33, 35, 36, 39–41.
Another fragmentarily preserved spelling variant is a part of an incomplete scene on one of the pillars of the porticoes on the Middle Courtyard (Fig. 2c). The whole tableau can be reconstructed, however, on a basis of analogies preserved on other pillars: the king stands embraced by Amon and above them, below the pt-sign, figures Horus Behdeti protecting the king. The inscription below it lists the royal protocole and next to it is a text in which Amon, called the ‘lord of the sky’ (nb pt), gives the king ‘millions of Sed festivals’.

An atypical element on the above-mentioned block is the symbol pt depicted as a foundation of the Sed chapel. It is a reference to the ideological meaning of the pillar, which symbolizes in architecture the supporting ‘post of the sky’.

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The term hb-sd was therefore used, therefore, to express different unknown connotations and its semantic meaning was much broader. Interestingly, a similar play on words is also attested in Luxor, in the part of the temple built by Amenhotep III.

The presented spelling variants of the Sed festival show to how large an extent the writing in ancient Egypt served other purposes than just to convey information. Like the depictions of rituals which can be interpreted on different levels, the textual notation of the ritual should be viewed as a multifaceted communication in which not a single word is found by chance, but was purposely inserted in order to present a world richer in meanings, bearing parallel references to events from the mythical world of the gods, to the ritual in progress, but also to the performed ritual actions.

(Translation: D. Dzierzibicka)

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15 Naville, Deir el Bahari III, London 1898, Pl. LXVI.
17 A. Gayet, Le temple de Louxor – 1er fascicule: Constructions d’Aménophis III, Paris 1894, Pl. XLV, Fig. 120 (Salle B).