

On the Rite of *sD deshrwt*

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The subject of this study is the funerary rite of *sD deshrwt*, the rite of breaking of the red pots. Borchardt discussed some of the scenes representing the rite in an article published in 1929¹ and some other scenes were later discussed by J. van Dijk². In spite of these and others who tried to explain it, the rite still needs further investigation. The researcher will try to find another interpretation for the meaning and symbolism of the rite.

The word *dSrwt* was used by Ancient Egyptians as a name for the short red pots with broad concave bottoms and narrower tops that were given number W 13 in Gardiner's sign list³. *Deshrwt* pots were specifically mentioned as water containers in some offering lists⁴ and were sometimes used in purification purposes⁵ and other funerary contexts⁶. Four vases of this type were often used in the opening of the mouth rite and were represented on the inner sides of the Middle Kingdom sarcophagi⁷. Four *Deshrwt* pots were used by priests in the rituals related to gods such as the purification rite of the gods' statues that was done inside sanctuaries⁸. However, this research is concerned with the use of this type of pots in the rite of *sD Dshrwt*⁹. It must be noted though, that other types of pots –

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¹ V. L. Borchardt, "Zerbrechens der Krüge", ZÄS 64, pp. 12-16.

² J. V. Dijk, "Zerbrechen der roten Töpfe", LÄ VI, 1390-96.

³ A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, Third Edition, Oxford, 1979, p. 529.

⁴ W. Barta, *Die Altägyptische Opferliste*, Berlin, 1963, p. 141, 143.

⁵ A. Erman, and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch Der Aegyptischen Sprach*, Berlin, 1971, vol. V., 493,4-6.

⁶ S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza*, vol. 4, Cairo, 1943, p. 81: Author mentions that *dshrwt* dishes were part of equipment of the washing tents.

⁷ M. G. Jécuire, *les frises d'objets des sarcophages du moyen empire*, MIFAO 47, Cairo, 1921, p. 308. Starting from the 18th dynasty they were sometimes used for wine in some offering lists: *Wb V*, 493, 7.

⁸ عبد الحليم نور الدين، الديانة المصرية القديمة، ج ٢، القاهرة ٢٠٠٩، ص ٤٦.

⁹ *Wb V*, 493,9-11.

usually longer necked ones- were also used in this ceremony -as shall be discuss below- which might indicate that the word *deshrwt* was intended as a description of the color of the pots not only the type¹⁰. **Fig. 1.**

Indications of the existence of this rite in the Archaic Period might be found in a second dynasty tomb discovered in Saqqara and bears the number 3477. The owner of this tomb is a woman whose mummy was found in the underground burial chamber in a wooden sarcophagus. On the floor of the burial chamber there were found pots that were broken intentionally either by throwing them to the floor or by hitting them with a stone pestle as traces indicated¹¹.

The rite was mentioned –probably for the first time- in the Pyramid Texts spell 244 as a rubric for the spell, “break the red pots” in the pyramid of Unas and that of Merenra. See **Fig. 1.** This spell tells the deceased to take the offering of the eye of Horus so that his enemy would fear him¹². It might be noted that this spell in the pyramid of Unas was preceded by five spells all related to offering, purification and burning of incense¹³.

The rite is also mentioned at the end of some offering lists¹⁴ **Fig. 2** sometimes preceded by the rite of *int rd* that has been interpreted as obliterating the footprints in the chapel by a *Khry-hebt* priest as a terminating rite on his way out of the tomb¹⁵ by the use of the *hdn* scented plant to keep the tomb

¹⁰ عصام محمد السعيد عبد الرازق، نصوص التدمير و الهلاك لأعداء مصر، دراسة لغوية أثرية تاريخية، رسالة دكتوراة غير منشورة، الأسكندرية، ١٩٩٣، ص ٧.

¹¹ ميروسلاف بارتا، رحلة الي الخلود، مقابر الأفراد بالدولة القديمة، براج، ٢٠١٣، ص ٨٥.

¹² K. Sethe, *Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte*, Leipzig, 1908, vol. I, § 249 and for translation see: S. A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts in Translation and Commentary*, NY, 1952, p. 74; R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Oxford, 1969, p. 58.

¹³ spell 199 of the heaping of the offerings, spell 32 a libation offering, spell 23, a ceremonial washing of hands and spells 25 & 200 two incense burning ones. A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, Part IV, London, 1924, p. 50.

¹⁴ for example: the offering list on the coffin of Nenkeftek at Deshasheh dating back to the fifth dynasty : W. M. F. Petrie , *Deshasheh*, London, 1898, pl. 29; tomb chapel 2 at Meir: Blackman, *op.cit.*, pl. 18; Barta, *Opferliste*, p. 72 & 87.

¹⁵ Blackman, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

purified and drive away evil spirits¹⁶. **Fig. 3.** The rite *int rd* was usually performed after the rites of presenting offerings and libations¹⁷.

Discussion of some scenes representing *sD deshrwt*:

The rite of *sD dshrwt* was mentioned in Old Kingdom texts more than in scenes but at least one scene of the sixth dynasty tomb of Meriruka is found to indicate it¹⁸. Beside a *khry-hebt* priests performing the *int rd* rite is a text giving the title of the rite and that of *sD dshrwt* as well as some offerings. Other priests are show pouring water in *deshrwt* pots. **Fig. 4.**

The rite does not appear in Middle Kingdom scenes that we know of but would be a common one at Amarna and post-Amarna tombs as well as later on. They were also much more common in the Memphite Necropolis than in the Theban. The pots were broken either by the use or a pestle¹⁹, by throwing them²⁰ or by smashing them together²¹.

In most of the scenes associated with the rite it has been noticed that it was performed by male mourners wailing and showing distress **Fig. 5** while some of them are pouring the water or breaking the jars. Those Priests in charge of the rite were called *khrijw dshrwt* 'Bearers of the red pots'²². Although rare but at least one scene in TT 44 shows a woman breaking the pots in hands before throwing them in a pile in front of her²³. **Fig. 6.**

It would be apparent in many of the scenes representing the rite that it was associated with the pouring of water. Unlike the

¹⁶ أحمد مصطفى عثمان، الكاهن المرتل، دراسة تحليلية في عصر الدولة القديمة، رسالة ماجستير غير منشورة، سوهاج، ١٩٩٩، ص ١٠٣.

¹⁷ Blackman, *op.cit.*, p. 50. For more on the rite of *int rd* N. d. G. Davies & A. H. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Amenemhēt (no. 82)*, London, 1915, pp. 93-94.

¹⁸ P. Duell, *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, Chicago, 1938, pl. 67.

¹⁹ Sethe, *loc. cit.*

²⁰ Borchardt, *ZÄS* 64, Pl. I, 1 & 4.

²¹ H. Bruner, *Die Südlichen Räume des Temples von Luxor*, AV 18, Mainz am Rhein, 1977, pl. 71.

²² A. Gardiner, "A Unique Funerary Liturgy", *JEA* 41, 1955, 16, pl. 6 (c).

²³ Borchardt, *op cit.*, p. 13 & pl. I, 1.

Mereruka scene when the water was poured in the pots, now the pots are usually long-necked and contain water that was poured before or while they were broken²⁴. The pouring of the water was done in a few scenes by turning the pots upside down as if in the attitude of watering something. **Fig.7.**

Another predominant element that might be noticed in these New Kingdom scenes, is the appearance of funerary booths that were placed by the end of the funerary processional way. **Fig. 8.** The pouring of water and the breaking of the jars took place right in front of them. **Fig. 9.** These booths were made out of palm branches and wickerwork and ornamented with palm leaves, papyrus, grapes and other plants. Sometimes large bouquets of flowers were placed inside. Usually four jars of one type were placed in each booth as well as stands of offerings inside and/or outside them. These booths varied in number but in quite a few scenes we noticed that there were four of them²⁵.

It might be noticed that the rite of *sD deshrwt* took place at the end of the offering rituals²⁶. In a few examples the rite of twisting the neck of a goose was performed by the booths²⁷ and in others the rite of cutting the leg of a calf that was done by the entrance of the tomb²⁸ is shown in the close vicinity²⁹. **Fig. 10.**

²⁴For example: A. R., Shulman, "The Berlin "Trauerrelief" (No. 12411) and some officials of Tut^cankhamūn and Ay", *JARCE* IV, 1965, p. 55 & pl. xxx; G. T. Martin, *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb, Commander in Chief of Twtankhamun*, vol. I, London, 1989, pl. 123; Borchardt, *ZÄS* 64, Pl. I, 4.

²⁵ M. Werbrouck, *les pleureuses dans l'Egypte Ancienne*, Bruxelles, 1938, pl. 35; V. E. Graefe, "Das Grab des Schatzhausvorstehers und bauleiters Maya in Saqqara", *MDAIK* 31, 1975, fig. 6b. Davies suggested that the purpose of these booths was to give to the dead the refreshments he needed after crossing the river and the hard way towards his tomb in the same manner done to the living master in his rounds around his estate. See: N. d. G. Davies *The Tomb of the Two Sculptors at Thebes*, NY, 1925, p. 48.

²⁶ *LÄ* VI, 1392.

²⁷ G. V. Erhart, , "Das Grab des Schatzhausvorstehers und bauleiters Maya in Saqqara", *MDAIK* 31, 1975, fig. 6 b; Werbrouck, *op. cit.*, pl.34.

²⁸ For more examples of this rite see: A. E. P. B. Weigall, "An Ancient Egyptian Funerary Ceremony", *JEA* 2, 1915, pp. 10-12.

²⁹ G.A. Gaballa, *The Memphite Tomb-chapel of Mose*, Warminster 1977, pl. 34 & Papyrus=

This might help in the determination of the location for the *sD deshrwt* that should have taken place right outside the tomb entrance³⁰. In another scene we find a booth with jars clearly placed by the entrance of the tomb³¹. **Fig. 11.**

The purpose of these booths specifically for the *sD deshrwt* rite is confirmed by a scene showing that *they were removed at the end of the rite after emptying and breaking the jars*³². **Fig. 12.**

The scenes of the Memphite tomb of Horemheb provide us with important details about the steps of the rite. It shows the male mourners in varied lamenting gestures by nicely built booths. Each booth contains four sealed jars and offerings stacked on stands with a trussed ox outside. **Fig. 13.** Palm branches decorated the booths from outside allowing what seem to be shady areas for the mourners. Several episodes are meant to indicate a considerable length for the rite. However, one episode showed an ox being slaughtered at the very same moment of throwing a jar after removing its stopper. The jar is seen with the water it once contained now gushing on the ground. **Fig. 14.** The act seems to have been repeated until all four pots are broken and four oxen slaughtered which corresponds to the burning of incense on a pile of offerings in an exaggerated manner. **Fig. 15.** The mourners continue the wailing by the broken jars and the slaughtered oxen in several episodes with varied strong lamenting gestures³³. Although the scenes do not provide any texts, a hieratic graffito written in red ink next to a slaughtered ox gives the name of the God Ra³⁴. **Fig. 16.** It have been noticed that

=of Pakerer, Leiden, Werbrouck, *op. cit.*, pl. 29.

³⁰ Blackman suggested that it took place of the threshold of the tomb see: Blackman, *Meir* IV, p. 51.

³¹ Werbrouck, *op. cit.*, pl.38.

³² A.R., Shulman, "The Berlin "Trauerrelief" (No. 12411) and some officials of *Tut^cankhamūn and Ay*", *JARCE* IV, 1965, pl. xxx.

³³ Martin, *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb*, vol. I, pls. 118-123. For similar scenes with several steps see: Borchardt, *op cit.*, p. 14 & pl. I, 2-4.

³⁴ Martin, *op cit.*, p. 101.

these booths are similar to those represented in scenes of the Aton temples of Amarna³⁵.

The rite appeared rarely on the walls of some temples and we find the only definite example in the Temple of Luxor in the room of twelve columns before the sanctuary³⁶ which had a function as an offering room for the cult statue³⁷. **Fig. 17.** Another scene in the sanctuary of the temple of Derr to the right and left of the entrance shows the king holding the *hdn* plant used in performing the *int rd* rite and a jar of water in the other that might have been used for sprinkling³⁸ and might indicate the performance of *sD deshrwt*. A scene in the temple of Oserkon³⁹ was also suggested to relate to the rite of *sd deshrwt* due to the manner in which the priest is pouring water of a jar⁴⁰.

The meaning of the rite:

A linkage was made between the *sD deshrwt* and the breaking of pottery figurines or pots representing enemies in the destruction rite⁴¹. These were usually inscribed with curse texts and were found around cemeteries or fortresses⁴². Some Egyptologists considered both rites to be the same⁴³. However, the lack of evidence of this linkage from Egyptian sources and the different nature of the two rituals led some others to study them separately⁴⁴.

³⁵ Martin, *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb, vol. I, p. 100. For scenes of the booths at the Aton temples see: N. D. G. Davies, Rock Tombs of Amarna, part I, London, 1903, pls. 12, 25, 27-8; part III, London, 1905, pls. 14, 30*

³⁶ Bruner, *Die Südlichen Räume, pls. 16, 71.*

³⁷ J. V. Dijk, *LÄ VI, 1394.*

³⁸ A. M. Blackman, *The Temple of Derr, Cairo, 1913, pl. LXIV.*

³⁹ E. Naville, *Festival- Hall of Osorkon II in the Great Temple of Bubastis (1887-1889), London, 1892, p. 34, pl. XXIV, 9.*

⁴⁰ Borchardt, *op cit., p. 16.*

⁴¹ *LÄ VI, 1390-96; and*

عصام محمد السعيد، المرجع السابق، ص ١٣-١٧.

⁴² G. Posner, "Ächtungstexte", *LÄ I, 67-69.*

⁴³ Jan Assmann, "Das Zerbrechen Der Roten Töpfe und die Ächtungstexte", Homages à Jean Leclant, *Études Pharaoniques, Vol. I, Bibliothèque d'Études 106/1, Cairo, 1994, pp. 50-55.*

⁴⁴ *LÄ VI, 1390.*

The rite of *sD dshrwt* has been given different interpretations. Blackman believed that it was meant to rid of the pots used in the funerary ceremony to prevent their usage by the living⁴⁵. We do find this hard to accept as the pots could have simply been disposed of without breaking and it is apparent from the studied scenes that the acts of emptying and of breaking the pots were intended. Moret, who related it to the destruction rite, has suggested that it was a wish that the enemies would break to pieces like the pots⁴⁶.

Davies suggested that the water pots were broken in a simulated transport of grief or to assimilate them to the state of the owner⁴⁷ and Martin adopted Sethe's interpretation of the rite as an indication to the enemies of the fate awaiting them if they intended hostilities against the deceased⁴⁸.

However, a few observations were noticed in the scenes studied in the course of this research. The common use of four *dshrwt* in the rite and the manner in which they were carefully placed in ornamented booths must have been intended for a symbolic purpose. In Ancient Egyptian rituals four was a common number for alters, objects as well as for activities⁴⁹ that connoted totality and completeness and was tied to the four cardinal points⁵⁰.

The particular use of the *dshrwt* pots might not have been haphazard but was probably intended for their color as well as for their name. The red color that was associated with fire and blood gave a variety of connotation such as danger, protection as well as life and regeneration. It also signified the fierce nature of the sun and is the color of *Atom-Ra*, the complete or the setting

⁴⁵ Blackman, *Meir* iv, p. 51.

⁴⁶ A. Moret, "Faites Nouveaux, Discussion", *RdE* 3, 1938, p. 167. He gives the same interpretation to the scene of Luxor temple mentioned above. See: *id.*, "Le rite de briser les vases rouges au temple de Louxor", *RdE* 3, 1938, p. 167.

⁴⁷ N. d. G. Davies. *The Tomb of the Two Sculptors at Thebes*, NY, 1925, p. 48, note 1.

⁴⁸ Martin, *Memphite Tomb*, p. 101 & FN. 4.

⁴⁹ R. H. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London, 1994, p. 133.

⁵⁰ *loc. cit.*

sun⁵¹. The scenes of *sd deshret* became common in the post-Amarna Period and the resemblance between the booths used in the temples of Amarna and those used for the rite might indicate a solar connection. The red color used for the name Ra by the breaking of the pots scenes in the tomb of Horemheb might be more than a mere coincidence.

As mentioned above, the *deshrwt* broken at the end of funerals were the same water containers used in the funerary rituals. The pouring or the gushing of the water from the jars was deliberate and might have been used to symbolize life and fertility as water usually does⁵².

Another revitalization symbol is found in the use of palm branches in the majority of the scenes representing the rite. One cannot help but noticing the resemblance between the way the palm branches were placed upright and the *rnpt* sign the symbol of years and the eternity god Heh⁵³ in the same manner that it was placed in the *hb-sd* shrines. Other plants used in the decoration of the booths like grapes and papyrus connoted meanings of life and rejuvenation⁵⁴ as well.

The representation of the rite in the temple of Luxor which is strongly related to the rejuvenation of the king and the god, and its place in the offering room before the sanctuary where the god would be born every day, might confirm this theory. The text written by the scene states: "break the red pots so that you may be given life"⁵⁵.

In the light of the above mentioned notes we might conclude that the rite of *sD deshrwt* and the destruction curse rite might have been two different rituals. It is possible that they started indicating the same magical purpose of annihilating the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵³ R. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, London, 1992, p. 119.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ Bruner, *op. cit.*, pl. 71.

enemies but by the New Kingdom the *sD deshrwt* might have developed differently.

The rite of *sD deshrwt* thus could have developed into a rite of revitalization and regeneration that was intended to help the deceased get back the powers of life represented in water, plantation and the red color. These meanings would be confirmed by the pouring of the blood of sacrifices as well as by the offerings and the burning of incense.

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The Figures

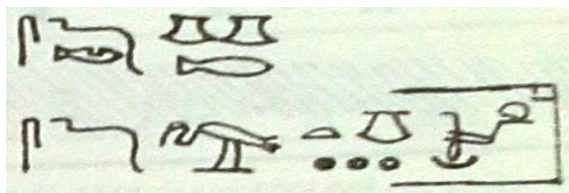


Fig. 1

Text indicating the use of different types of pots for the rite of *sD dshrwt*.

K. Sethe, *Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte*, Leipzig, 1908, Vol. I, § 249.

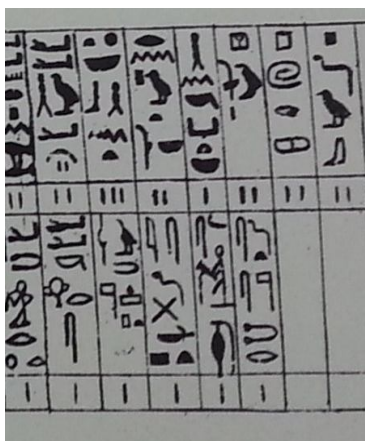


Fig. 2

The offering list on the coffin of Nenkheftek at Deshasheh with *sD dshrwt*.

W. M. F. Petrie, *Deshasheh*, London, 1898, pl. 29, detail.

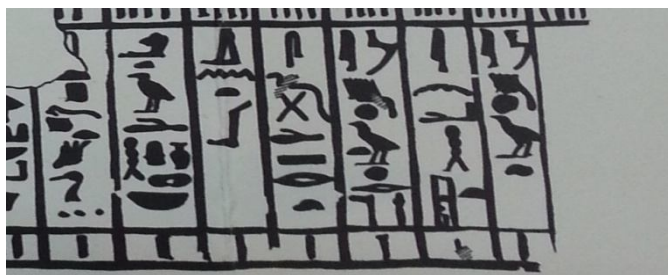


Fig. 3.

The rite of *sD dshrwt* right after the rite of *int rd*, Tomb Chapel No. 2 at Meir.

Aylward M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, Part IV, London, 1924, pl 18, detail.



Fig. 4.

The rite of *sD dshrwt* and the rite of *int-rd* in the Tomb of Mereruka.

Prentice Duell, *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, Chicago, 1938 pl. 67.

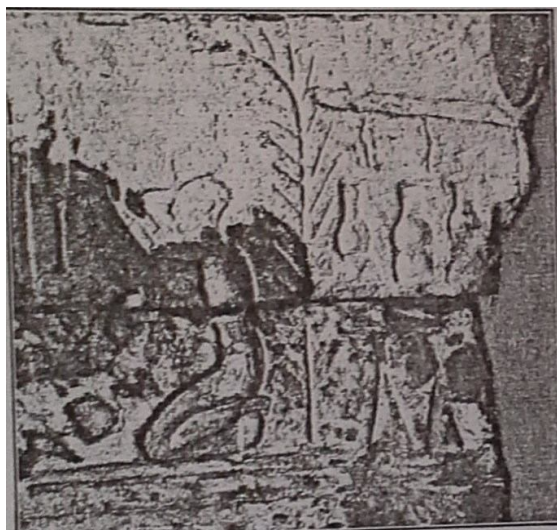


Fig. 5

A male mourner performing the rite of *sD dshrwt*.

Quibell, *Saq.*, 1908-10, pl. LXXX,4.



Fig. 6.

A female mourner performing the rite of *sD dshrwt*.

Von Ludwig Borchardt, "Bilder des Zerbrechens der Krüge", ZÄS 64, pl. I, 1.



Fig.7.

Pouring of water with the *sD deshrwt* rite.

Borchardt, ZÄS 64, Pl. I, 4. 19th dynasty, Memphite Necropolis.



Fig.8.

Booths at the end of the funerary procession

The tomb of Nakhtamun (TT 341): *Davies, Seven Private Tombs*, pl. 25



Fig.9.

Funerary booths

Werbrouck, *Pleureses*, pl. 35

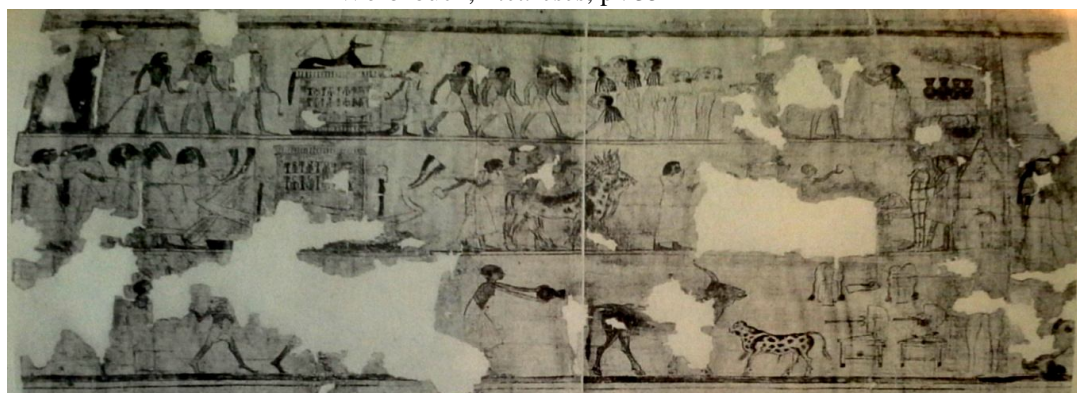


Fig. 10.

The cutting of the leg of a calf by the entrance of a tomb

Papyrus of Pakerer, Leiden, Werbrouck, *Pleureuse*, pl. 29.



Fig. 11.

Booths by the Tomb entrance

Werbrouck, *pleureuse*, pl.38



Male mourners performing *sD deshrwt* by funerary booths.

Other men to the left removing the booths afterwards.

A. R. Shulman, "The Berlin "Trauerrelief" (No. 12411) and some officials of
Tut'ankhamūn and Ay", *JARCE* IV, 1965, p. 55 & pl. xxx



Fig. 13.

Male mourners by booths containing offerings and four sealed jars each.

Martin, *Memphite Tomb*, pl. 118 (detail).

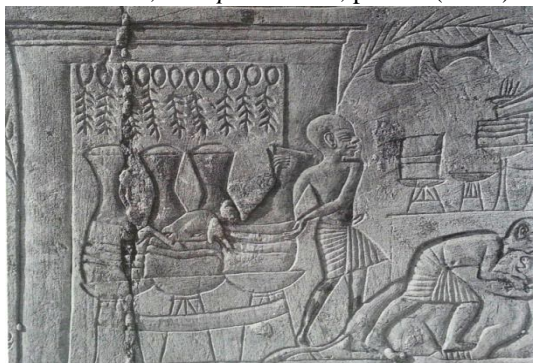


Fig. 14.

Opening and breaking jars with the slaughter of bulls.

Martin, *Memphite Tomb*, pl. 119 (detail).



Fig. 15.

Purification of the Offerings by four Broken Jars and slaughtered bulls
Martin, *Memphite Tomb*, pl. 120 (detail).

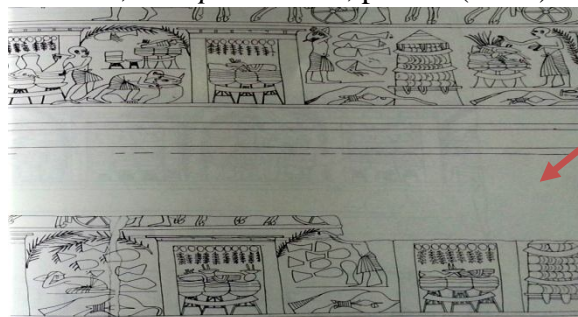


Fig. 16.

A graffiti with the name of Re written in red by the rite of *sD deshrwt*
Martin, *Memphite Tomb*, pl. 123.

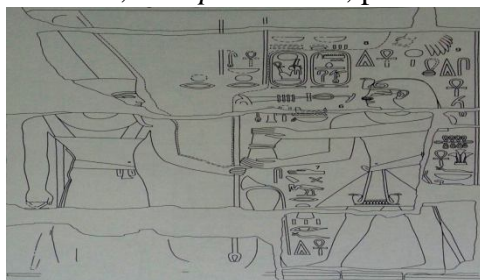


Fig. 17.

sD deshrwt in the Temple of Luxor

H. Bruner, *Die Südlichen Räume des Temples von Luxor*, AV 18, Mainz
am Rhein, 1977, pl. 71.