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Who Painted the Tomb of Sennedjem?

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Who Painted the Tomb of Sennedjem?

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The tomb of Sennedjem is one of the best known at Deir el-Medina. Its good state of preservation and the care given by the painter in the decoration of the monument has allowed it to go down in history. However, few have discussed the author due to a lack of evidence. In this article, a hypothesis about the artists of the burial chamber is proposed and the traces that have led to them.

¿Quién pintó la tumba de Sennedjem?

La tumba de Sennedjem es una de las más conocidas de Deir el-Medina. Su buen estado de conservación y el cuidado con el que el pintor realizó la decoración han permitido que pasara a la Historia. Sin embargo, son muy pocos los que se han arriesgado a hablar del autor debido a la falta de evidencias. En este artículo se propone una hipótesis sobre ese posible autor y sobre las evidencias que conducen a él.

Keywords: Deir el-Medina, Pashed, Thebes, Nineteenth Dynasty, artist, painter, burial chamber.

Palabras clave: Deir el-Medina, Pashed, Tebas, Dinastía XIX, artista, pintor, cámara funeraria.

The tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1) is considered a significant artistic reference in the environment of Deir el-Medina. Its exquisite decoration and good state of conservation have turned it into one of the most important tombs in the village, as it is frequently visited and well known.¹ However, information about the tomb owner is limited.² The career of Sennedjem spans across the reign of Sety I to the early years of Ramesses II. This timeframe places him under the foremen Baki (TT 298) and Neferhotep “the older” together

with the royal scribe Amenemipet (TT 215 and TT 265). Therefore, Sennedjem was active in the gang during the construction and decoration of the royal tombs of Sety I, Nefertari, and the first stages of the tomb of Ramesses II, amongst others.³

Regarding his career, there is a lot of uncertainty. In his tomb and in the burial chamber of his son Khabekhnet (TT 2), Sennedjem is mentioned with the generic title of *sdm-ꜥꜥ*, which was mainly a functionally unspecific title and is found almost exclusively in funer-

¹ PM I (1), 1–5; Bruyère 1959; Shedid 1994; Haring 2006; Saura Sanjaume 2006; Mahmoud 2011.

² C. Keller already identified the work of the painters Hormin, Nebnefer and Amenhotep in royal and private tombs, and in the burials of their colleagues using comparative studies between tombs and signed figured ostraca (Keller 2003: 83–114, 2001: 73–93). Their comparisons were confirmed by T. Bács, who identified the hand of these same artists in TT 65 (Bács 2011: 33–41). This paper tries to focus just on tomb decoration, although we do not discard the involvement of the artists in funerary equipment inside and outside the village, current research that is being carried out and whose conclusions are still in progress.

³ Sennedjem’s career was dated wrongly by Daressy to the reign of Ramesses IV and corrected later by Bruyère in his publication of the tomb; Bruyère 1959: 75. For the dating of Sennedjem’s career to the beginning of the 19th Dynasty, see Bierbrier 1975: 30.

ary and religious contexts and not associated with any kind of labour.⁴ In administrative documents, he is just once mentioned as *sš*,⁵ which would explain the discovery of a fragment from the tale of Sinuhe in his tomb.⁶ However, the funerary equipment found in his burial chamber seems to hint at a career more focused on the structural design of a tomb, or architectural and designing tasks, rather than the career of a scribe.⁷

As is already known, TT 1 is part of a funerary complex that comprises the chapels of Tjar, Sennedjem, and Khonsu, members of the same family, as well as shaft numbers 1182, 1183, and that of Sennedjem.⁸ From a chronological perspective, the chapel of Khonsu was the last to be decorated since the pyramidion corresponding to the tomb⁹ mentions the scribe Ramose, whose career began in year 5 of Ramesses II,¹⁰ dating the tomb of Sennedjem prior to this year.

It is not the aim of this article to describe the decoration of the burial chamber of TT 1 since it is well known; however, it is necessary to highlight the tomb of Sennedjem from an artistic point of view in terms of its style. We speak of style when we refer to the distinct characteristics of a painter, which define his work. When an artist draws, he follows established artistic parameters and rules coupled with an innate individual style, generated by

this training, his experience, his skills and personal tricks. In many cases, the most distinguishable characteristics of an artist's style are best recognized in facial features, such as the eyes, the mouth, the nose, etc.

There are very different artistic styles in the tombs of Deir el-Medina. The variety is extensive, from very careful styles to those more fluid. But the decoration in the tomb of Sennedjem stands out amongst all of them for its quality in the execution of the paintings. It is in this style where we must start when looking for the artist practices and individualities.

The value of forms and style was already evoked by R. Tefnin when he defended the need to approach Egyptian painting through the “observation la plus rapprochée possible de la facture, de la palette, du geste, (...)”.¹¹ This reflection invites us to observe how the same object and/or detail can be represented differently depending on the hand that performs it. However, this methodology was not new. In 1892 Giovanni Morelli, a politician and critic of Italian art, used anatomical details and pictorial techniques to attribute Italian paintings to an artist or art school, establishing a typology of stylistic details by observing patterns that were repeated and that corresponded to habitual techniques associated with a particular artist (poses, move-

ment, colors, fabric folds, or anatomical details such as hands and ears).¹² This method was used by A. Kozloff and B. Bryan to identify the anonymous artist style of some of the Theban tomb paintings,¹³ and by C. Keller to analyze the work of some artist from Deir el-Medina,¹⁴ among others. The identification of styles with certain artists had been used for decades to study the decoration of Greek vases, a methodology that G.M. Richter described by saying that “each artist reveals himself by the general effect of his picture and by his own particular rendering of individual forms; only the differentiation is subtler than in later paintings,... withing the narrow restraint of conventionalized design”.¹⁵

Many have tried to repeat this, from a stylistic point of view, the tombs of Deir el-Medina dating from the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty. A-P. Zivie, in his publication on Pashed's tomb (TT 3), said that, based on J. Černý's previous opinion,¹⁶ the style of Pashed's tomb was very close to the tombs of Sennedjem (TT 1), Amennakht (TT 218), Nebenmaat (TT 219) and Irinefer (TT 290), and that these could have been performed by the artist himself or by a master and his apprentices.¹⁷ However, the statements of Černý and Zivie seems to be based on the fact that all these workmen are mentioned together in administrative documentation as part of the same gang and that, therefore, these

tombs would have be built and decorated at the same time. However, these tombs present different styles in the rendering of the figures when they are observed closely, and the contemporary nature of their owners does not seem enough to identify the same artist as the author of the decoration. Sennedjem's design is much more careful and there is a high concern for proportion and shape, something that we did not find in TT 219, and, although there are similarities between TT 3, TT 218¹⁸ and TT 290, these are not comparable with TT 1. On the other hand, the participation of the artist employed in Sennedjem's tomb in these other tombs cannot be excluded either, but not as a unique artist but as part of a small crew or a specific participation at a moment in time, considering that a tomb could be decorated in different stages depending on time and economy.

C. Keller, in a paper published in 1991, found some similarities between the tomb of Sennedjem, the tomb of Sety I (KV 17), and several tombs of Ramesses II's wives, such as QV 40 and Nefertari (QV 66). In Sety I's tomb, the stylistic parallels were mainly found in the astronomical ceiling and in unfinished areas since they were not sculpted and the work of the painters is easier to analyze. In this case, it was not just facial features but also certain anatomical details that alluded to the style of TT 1.¹⁹

4 *KRI* III 815, 8.

5 UC 32003. Unpublished. See www.petrie.ucl.ac.uk (accessed 18/10/2019); Černý, *Notebook* 36.55.

6 That could mean literate, not specifically a professional scribe. O. Cairo JE 27419; Mahmoud 2011: 54. It was found near the coffin of Sennedjem.

7 The equipment includes a cubit rod (Cairo JE 27211), a square level (Cairo JE 27258), a plumb bob (Cairo JE 27260), a ceramic gauge (Cairo JE 27247), a square (Cairo JE 27259), and a “cordelette de maçon” (Cairo JE 27272); Shedid 1994: 51 (figs. 30–32); Mahmoud 2011: 52.

8 Bruyère 1959: pls. V, VII and XIII.

9 Bruyère 1959: 50–51, 261; Andreu 2002: no. Cat. 254, 304.

10 See O. Cairo CG 25671; Černý 1935a: 55–56, pls. 75*, LXX.

11 Tefnin 2006: 66.

12 Morelli 1892.

13 Kozloff and Bryan 1992: 264–283; Bryan 2001: 63–72.

14 Keller 2001: 73–93.

15 Richter and Hall 1936: XIX–XX.

16 Černý 1973: 293.

17 Zivie 1979: 131.

18 Taking into account that TT 218 has two burial chambers and these seem to have been excavated, built and decorated by distinct artists and in different periods of time.

19 Keller 1991: 62.

The artistic details that Keller remarked about are in other tombs at Deir el-Medina, such as the tomb of the scribe Amenemipet, a contemporary of Sennedjem. Both his tomb chapel (TT 215) and his burial chamber (TT 265) show traces of these similarities.²⁰ These monuments had been constructed and decorated before year 5 of Ramesses II, when Amenemipet was replaced in the crew by the scribe Ramose, likely as the result of the former's death.²¹ The paintings and the human figures show the same stylistic features identified in Sennedjem's tomb and are, therefore, likely to be the work of the same artist (fig. 1).

But do we have any information about the artist? B. Bruyère found in the magazine of the site a relief fragment of unknown provenance, which, according to him, had the dimensions of the stela that occupied one of the walls in the chapel of TT 1.²² On this fragment, the draughtsman Parahotep²³ is depicted taking part in the funeral procession of the deceased (fig. 2).²⁴ Because of this, Bruyère considered the likelihood that his appearance in the stela justified the inclusion of Parahotep in the decoration of the tomb. However, Bruyère

did not find the fragment in the tomb, but rather in a magazine, and it was attributed to the tomb without strong evidence. No additional references to the stela have been found except for Bruyère's drawing that was published in his volume on the tomb.²⁵

Moreover, some figured ostraca were found close to Sennedjem's house (SW VI) and executed in the same style as the tomb painting. Bruyère, without an apparent reason, argues that these ostraca belonged to one of Sennedjem's sons, also named Parahotep—the same name inscribed on the stela.²⁶ Therefore, he concludes that the son of Sennedjem was the artist of the tomb (fig. 3). However, his son and the painter were not the same person, and the discovery of the ostraca near the house of Sennedjem could be related to the close vicinity of the painter Parahotep's house (SW IV).²⁷ Regarding the style of the drawings, it is difficult to verify because Bruyère does not provide additional information to help identify them.

After a paleographic analysis of the tomb of Sennedjem, B. Haring pointed out that the uniform style of the hieroglyphs demonstrates the work of a single artist.²⁸ However, some

²⁰ The tomb-chapel and burial chamber are several meters away so they received different numbers; PM I (1), 311–312 (TT 215), 346 (TT 265).

²¹ See n. 9.

²² According to Saura Sanjaume 2006: 48, a fragment of the same stela is kept in the Turin Museum (No. 50075); Roccati and Tosi 1972: 112–113, pl. 294.

²³ The draughtsman Parahotep, son of the draughtsman Pay, was active in the crew during the reign of Ramesses II. Davies 1999: 150–151, chart 10.

²⁴ It is quite common to depict members of the gang in funerary procession or rituals since their colleagues actively participated in the funeral and in religious activities. See column base Cairo JE 25111/51512 where the sculptors Ken, Huy and Neferrenpet, and the draughtsman Nebra, among others, are listed as being involved in the cult of Amenhotep I as *wab*-priests and lector-priests; KRI III, 682; Černý 1927: 194 f.; Davies 2014: 34 f.; El Shazli 2015: 166 f.

²⁵ Bruyère 1959: 10, fig. 4.

²⁶ Bruyère 1959: 14, n. 1.

²⁷ The house of Parahotep was identified by Bruyère from a jamb found there; Bruyère 1939: 324–325, fig. 195; PM I (2), 703i; KRI III, 649.

²⁸ Haring 2006: 22.



Figure 1. Comparison between the tomb-chapel of Amenemipet, TT 215 and his burial chamber TT 265 (upper part) and Sennedjem, TT 1 (lower part). Photographs by the author.

subtle differences in the facial features of the figures are noticeable, so the presence of a second painter should not be ruled out. The difficulty in distinguishing both hands could be due to the fact that it is the work of a master and an apprentice, perhaps father and son (see fig. 1, below).

One of them, which will be called “Artist 1,” is discernable on the north, south, west, and east walls, in addition to parts of the ceiling. The superiority of his work in the tomb could

be due to the fact that he is the older painter of the two. His style is more reserved and rigid. His figures feature a serious expression. Compared to the other artist, his depictions of noses have a more rounded shape, almond-shaped eyes with a downward curving tear duct, and the commissure of lips is a delicate brush stroke (fig. 4, left).

The second one, or “Artist 2,” is noticeable on the ceiling. His style is characterized by also making the eyes almond-shaped, but slight-

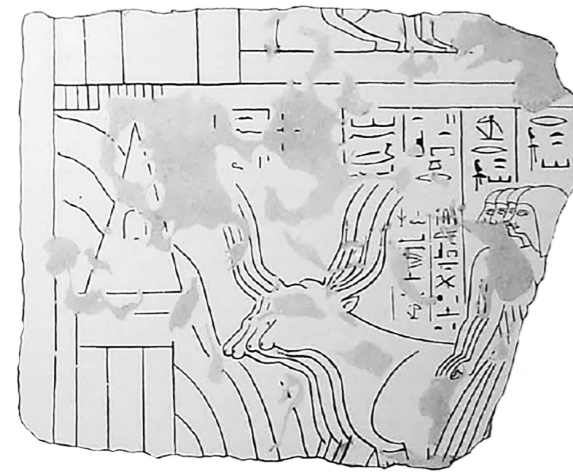


Figure 2. Fragment of stela assigned to Sennedjem chapel. Bruyère 1959: 10, fig.4.



Figure 3. Sennedjem and Parahotep houses. Bruyère 1959: 6, fig. 3.

ly more elongated and pointed, a straighter nose that is occasionally somewhat pointed, and a more marked commissure of lips that outlines a slight smile (fig. 4, right).

If there were two artists, who were they? Will we find any evidence to confidently identify them? At this point, a tomb located in the northern part of the cemetery, TT 323, may shed some light on these questions (fig. 5). The chapel was destroyed and only the great hollow in the rock has been preserved. This would have been decorated with limestone slabs, none of which are *in situ*.²⁹ The burial chamber was large. Its decoration, originally monochrome,³⁰ has reddened over time and possibly as the result of a fire inside the tomb (fig. 6). However, the important fact is that, if we focus on the decoration it is possible to observe some stylistic features in the figures which recall those in the tomb of Sennedjem. Two hands of artists were also observed, and the characteristics of their styles coincided with those in TT 1 (fig. 7).

Everything starts to make sense once the tomb owner is investigated. An individual named Pashed, who was active in the construction of the tomb of Sety I and trained in the temples of Sokar and Karnak.³¹ He would have been the only workman at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty to hold the position of “chief of draughtsmen”.³² Besides himself, his son Maainakhtuef was the only one of his offspring depicted in the burial chamber. Pashed would become the head of a long line of painters that would

²⁹ PM I (1), 394–395; Bruyère 1925: 80–90, pls. I, XXIII, XXIV.

³⁰ Bruyère 1952.

³¹ He holds the title of “draughtsman of Amun” like his father Amenemhat, although the latter does not seem to be involved with Deir el-Medina.

³² The title of “chief of draughtsmen” does not appear in the administrative documents, but in the inscriptions of his burial chamber.



Figure 4. Tomb of Sennedjem. Left: small details of “Artist 1”. Right: “Artist 2”. Photographs by Kairoinfo4u (images labelled ©) and by the author.

reach the Twentieth Dynasty and last until the end of village life at Deir el-Medina.³³ Moreover, this is the only tomb of a draughtsman preserved at the site.³⁴

The documentation preserved concerning Pashed is not very abundant. The earliest reference comes from a stela belonging to the chief of craftsmen Didi, found in TT 359 courtyard.³⁵ This stela places Pashed as part of the royal gang at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty. To be more precise, his career started during the reign of Sety I, as shown on

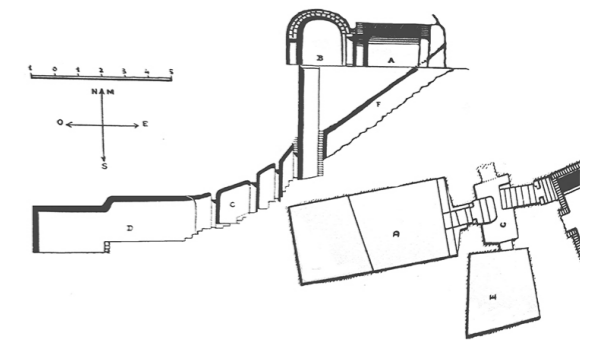


Figure 5. Burial chamber TT 323 of Pashed at Deir el-Medina. Bruyère 1925: pl. XXIII.

³³ Menéndez 2019: 222, 242–252. About the genealogy of Pashed, Davies 1999: 155–166, chart 11.

³⁴ The chapel No. 1190 could be assigned to the draughtsman Merysekhmet regarding the finds in the area around the tomb. The chapel does not have decoration remains; Bruyère 1930: 38. Another tomb, No. 1212, is named by Bruyère “chapelle du dessinateur” because of the title found in a graffiti and in some fragments detached from the decoration, although the owner is unknown; Bruyère 1930: 18–19, pls. I, IV.

³⁵ Bruyère 1933: 91, no. 11; KRI I, 402 (16).



Figure 6. Details of the burial chamber of Pashed (TT 323). Photographs by the author.

his stela where the royal cartouche is depicted.³⁶ Regarding his home, Pashed's house was located in the northwest of the village, where a jamb of the chief of draughtmen and his wife, the "chantress of Amun" Neferitery, was found.³⁷ The role

of Maaninakhtuef was important, since he is the only son depicted in the burial chamber, what places him in the decoration of the tomb like the firstborn of the family.³⁸ His wife, Tinetimentet, was the daughter of the workmen Neferren-

³⁶ Bruyère 1925: 86–87, fig. 15; *KRI I*, 394.

³⁷ House NO XV; PM I (2), 702; Bruyère 1939: 43, 291; *KRI I*, 395; Demarée 1983: 145–146.

³⁸ He is mentioned together with his family in the offerings table Turin N. 22025. Habachi 1977: 29–30. See also the fragment of stela BM EA 261; James 1970: 41; *KRI I*, 395; PM I (2), 740.

pet and the sister of Neferabu, owner of TT 5, a circumstance that resulted in the inclusion of the painter in the scenes of the burial chamber of his in-laws and of some stelae and other inscriptions.³⁹ He is mentioned holding the titles of "draughtman of Amun" and "draughtman of *st-m3't*" during the reign of Ramesses II. His career was quite long, since he is documented in the year 39/40 of the reign of Ramesses II in a list of workers from the royal tomb.⁴⁰

Presumably, Pashed, who was an expert in pictorial technique with extensive experience, decorated his own burial chamber and was helped, perhaps, by one of his children. During his career, he would have provided his services as payment to the other members of the crew, a common practice between workmen.⁴¹

If we take as a stylistic sample the two tombs, TT 1 and TT 323, it is possible to identify him as part of the active gang in Sety I and Nefertari. In the same way, his work is attested in some of the private tombs of Deir el-Medina. "Artist 1" appears, almost exclusively, in the chapel of the scribe Amenemipet (TT 215) (fig. 8),⁴² built, as we have mentioned, several meters from his burial chamber (TT 265) (figs. 1 and 9).⁴³ As both are early datable tombs, it is very probable that we are talking about a style corresponding to the senior artist.⁴⁴ In this case, chapel TT 215 is very badly preserved, and just allows us to analyse the smallest figures of the decoration.

"Artist 2" could be identified in most cases in Amenemipet's burial chamber (TT 265),



Figure 7. Comparative image of the two styles of the tomb of Pashed and the tomb of Sennedjem. The similarities in the profile of the figures show the hands of the same artists in both tombs. Photographs by the author.

where, in addition, some of the iconographic elements of Nefertari's tomb were reproduced, probably at the request of the owner.⁴⁵ But also, in tombs dated after year 5 of Ramess-

³⁹ Stela BM EA 150+1754, Stela BM EA 269 and jamb Rennes Museum. James 1970: pl. XXX; Hall 1925: 40; Bruyère 1930: 84, fig. 39; *KRI III*, 651, 774; PM I (1), 4; PM I (2), 725, 739 (b).

⁴⁰ O. DeM 266 and O. DeM 0049. *KRI III*, 554, 574; *KRI VII*, 195; Černý 1935b: 14, pls. 42–42a; Černý 1939: 7, pl. 8.

⁴¹ Cooney 2008: 79–115.

⁴² PM I (1), 311–312.

⁴³ PM I (1), 346.

⁴⁴ See footnote no. 11.

⁴⁵ Menéndez 2019: 184, 185–186.



Figure 8. Tomb-chapel of Amenemipet (TT 215). Photographs by the author.

es II, such as the tomb of Ipuy (TT 217),⁴⁶ stylistic elements that remind us of our artist are found (fig. 10). In this case, the diversity of styles in the same tomb does not rule

out the existence of other artists in the project. Among the common elements, the knee marks stand out, sometimes with two inner curves, but with the same shape; the representation

⁴⁶ PM I (1), 315–317.



Figure 9. Burial chamber of Amenemipet (TT 265). Photographs by the author.

Figure 10. Tomb-chapel of Ipuy (TT 217). Photographs by the author.



Figure.11. Details of knees in Amenemipet (TT 265), Ipuy (TT 217), Sety I (KV 17) and Nefertari (QV 60). Photographs by Kairoinfo4u (images labelled ©) and by the author.



Figure.12. Details of hands in Amenemipet (TT 265), Ipuy (TT 217), Sety I (KV 17) and Nefertari (QV 60). Photographs by Kairoinfo4u (images labelled ©) and by the author.

of the toes, elongated, with the nails and the lower wrinkles and, sometimes, with a visual perspective; as well as the facial features mentioned above, with slanted eyes of blank look (figs. 11, 12, 13 and 14).

The identification of this particular style, the main aim of this paper, causes the inevitable distinction of other types of tombs that seem to be related to each other stylistically. To identify the diversity implies observing the decoration of the rest of the tombs. In this second group we would find tombs such as those of Nakhtamon (TT 335), Khabekhnat (TT 2B) and Nebenmaat (TT 219).⁴⁷ The

style is somewhat less careful, the nose is more pointed, the commissure of the lips is marked by a descending line or a stain, and an almond-shaped eye that, unlike the previous cases, seems to look straight (fig. 15). It is difficult to say with certainty to whom we can attribute the decoration of this other group. In the community of Deir el-Medina two painters' families were active in these years: the family of Pashed and the family of Ipuy.⁴⁸ However, we do not have enough evidence to state that this second stylistic group belongs to the second family. What does seem clear is the difference between them.

⁴⁷ PM I (1), 8–9 (burial chamber), 320–322, 401–404; Menéndez 2019: 296–297, figs. 152, 153 and 154.

⁴⁸ Menéndez 2019: 220–221.



Figure.13. Details of feet and toes in Amenemipet (TT 265), Ipuy (TT 217) and Nefertari (QV 60). Photographs by Kairoinfo4u (image labelled ©) and by the author.



Figure.14. Details of faces in Amenemipet (TT 265), Ipuy (TT 217) and Nefertari (QV 60). Photographs by Kairoinfo4u image labelled ©) and by the author.



Figure 15. Details of faces in Nakhtamon (TT 335), Khabekhnet (TT 2B) and Nebenmaat (TT 219). Photographs by the author.

Once the differences are identified, we can go back to the main aim of this article: to identify the author of Sennedjem's tomb. Considering that the burial chamber of the chief of draughtsmen Pashed was decorated, certainly, by himself, and that the style he presents is similar to that of Sennedjem, it is possible to establish a clear artistic connection by attributing the decoration to one of the most influential artist of the gang. Among the workforce of the village would be Sennedjem, a gang colleague with whom he would have worked closely with in the tomb of Sety I and in the Valley of the Queens. Both were contemporaneous and their tombs matched in form and style. In this way, Pashed would have become the artist of one of the most well-known and memorable tombs at Deir el-Medina and the entire Nineteenth Dynasty.

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In 2011, the author of this article was invited to give a lecture at a workshop of the FNRS contact group – Egyptology organized at the University of Liège. The presentation focused on the involvement of Deir el-Medina's workers in private tombs. During the discussion after the lecture, Ben Haring asked if it would be possible to identify the author of Sennedjem's tomb. This question prompted the following research, the results of which are presented in this article. The author thanks Prof. Dr. Dimitri Laboury and the University of Liège for supporting her to carry out her research as part of the project Painters and Painting in Theban necropolis under the XVIIIth Dynasty, and his corrections and suggestions in the final version of the article. Thanks are also given to the MSA and IFAO

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