

Land-Tenure in the New Kingdom: The Role of Women Smallholders and the Military

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THE LONGEST AND MOST COMPLETE of all Pharaonic Egyptian documents concerning land-tenure and the assessment of agricultural land is the great Wilbour Papyrus, a genuine official register, written in hieratic, dating to year 4 of Ramesses V of the Twentieth Dynasty (1142 BC).¹ Its great length, excellent state of preservation, and the wealth of valuable detail it contains make the Wilbour Papyrus one of the most important of all Pharaonic secular papyri. For all this, the Wilbour Papyrus poses considerable difficulties since the text as we have it does not identify either the authority under which the data were compiled, or the purpose for which the survey was made. These particulars were possibly contained at the beginning of the document, which is lost.

The Wilbour Papyrus is a unique register, having no exact analogue during Pharaonic times. The fragmentary Nineteenth-Dynasty Louvre Leather Fragments are perhaps comparable in their record of plots ascribed to smallholders, but these blackened scraps are too short and poorly preserved to be of much use for comparative study. Also analogous are *P. Reinhardt* and *P. Prachov*, and the 'Grundbuch' papyri, Twenty-first-Dynasty ledgers written in difficult cursive hieratic, which are also relevant to discussions of land-tenure and smallholding.² These documents, however, cannot compete with the Wilbour Papyrus for detail and completeness.

The Wilbour Papyrus is important for yet another reason. It dates to the period

¹ Gardiner (1941–8); Faulkner (1952).

² Gasse (1988); Vleeming (1993).

immediately after the death of the last great Ramesside pharaoh, Ramesses III. It is likely, therefore, to reflect the system of land-tenure operative during the latter part of the Ramesside period, and therefore has a better documented *Sitz im Leben* than either *P. Reinhardt* or *P. Prachov*. The date of the Wilbour Papyrus also emphasises the relevance of the contents of the Great Harris Papyrus (*P. Harris I*), the detailed official record of the benefactions bestowed by Ramesses III upon many temples.³ Both valuable documents are the products of empire, even if the empire they reflect was, at their date of composition, already in a state of decline following costly wars and domestic problems.

Since Sir Alan H. Gardiner's publication of a translation and commentary to the Wilbour Papyrus in 1948, several scholars have attempted to shed further light from a variety of perspectives on the fiscal operations detailed in this document.⁴ Despite these valiant efforts, there are many fundamental questions that remain unresolved and possibly unresolvable given our limited understanding of the Ramesside agrarian economy and its administration. Nevertheless, in 1982, Russian Egyptologist I.A. Stuchevsky published a study of the Wilbour Papyrus that provides the boldest reconstruction of Ramesside land-tenure to date, against which the data of the Wilbour Papyrus may be assessed and evaluated in the context of institutional landownership and smallholding.⁵ Any attempt to discuss the smallholders of the Wilbour Papyrus and the land-tenure they represent must consider the valuable insights the Russian scholar has provided, although some of his conjectures still cannot be proven.

The Wilbour Papyrus consists of two separate but related documents (Figures 3.1, 3.2). The longer Text A enumerates some 2,800 plots of land located in Middle Egypt from the vicinity of Minya in the south to just north of Medinet el-Fayyum in the north, organised under the headings of various landholding or administering institutions. Text B, on the other hand, summarises the plots of *khato*- and *minē*-land understood by Gardiner as 'crown-land'. It is Text A that identifies individual smallholders and this is the main focus of my attention in the present study.

Text A records the measurement and assessment of plots of cultivable land that came under the administration of both temples and secular institutions. There are altogether 279 paragraphs in Text A organised into four sections that correspond to four consecutive periods of assessment dating roughly from 8–24 July (Gregorian).⁶ Each paragraph has a heading that identifies a landholding institution (religious or secular) that may have been responsible for the general administration of the plots and the collection of the grain revenues accruing from

³ Erichsen (1933); Schädel (1936).

⁴ Helck (1961); Menu (1970); Stuchevsky (1982); Katary (1989). Vinogradov wrote a thesis on the Wilbour Papyrus but, to my knowledge, it has not been translated from the Russian.

⁵ Stuchevsky (1982). English summary by Janssen (1986), 351–66.

⁶ Janssen (1987), 136 corrects Gardiner's dating (1941–8), II, 10.

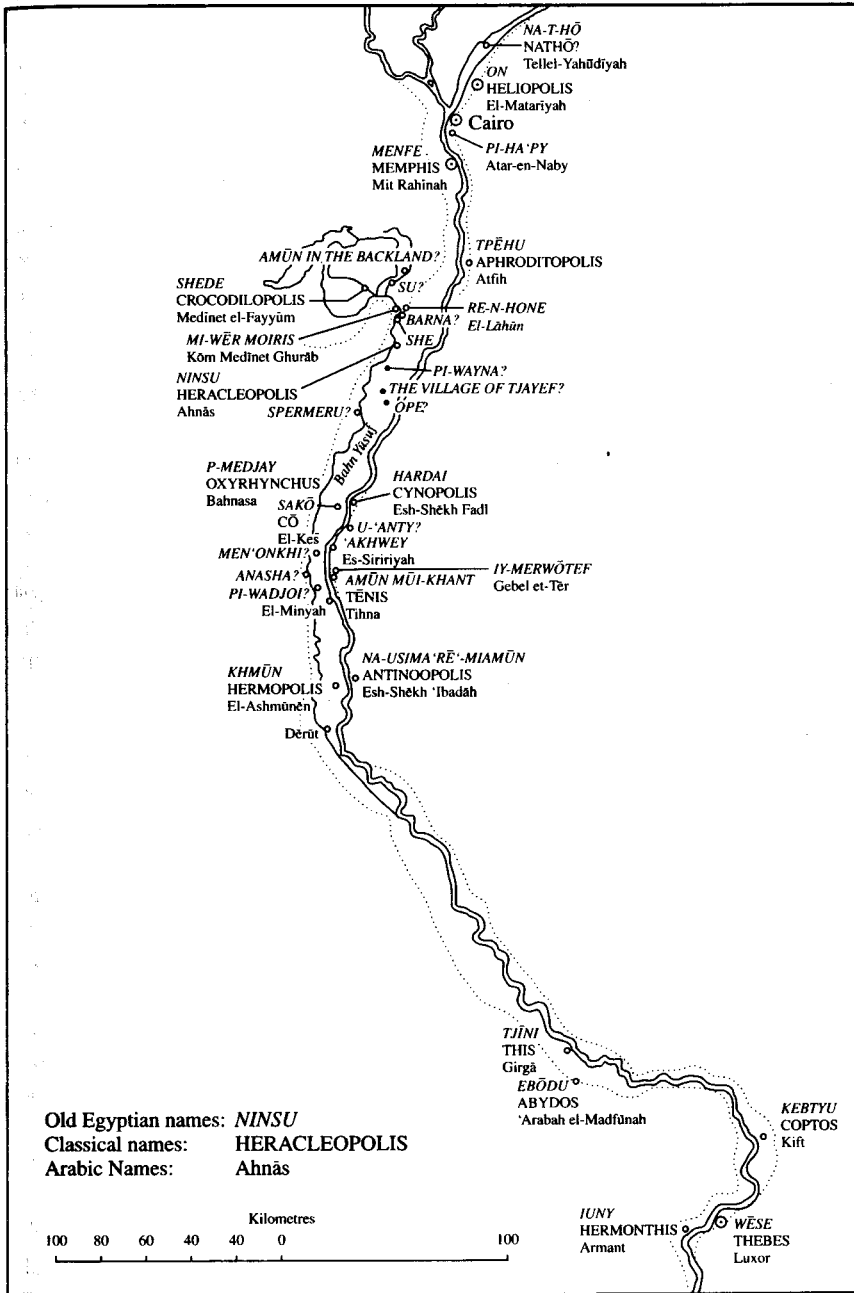


Figure 3.1 Towns and villages of the Wilbour Papyrus.
 Source Gardiner (1941–8), between pp. 54 and 55.

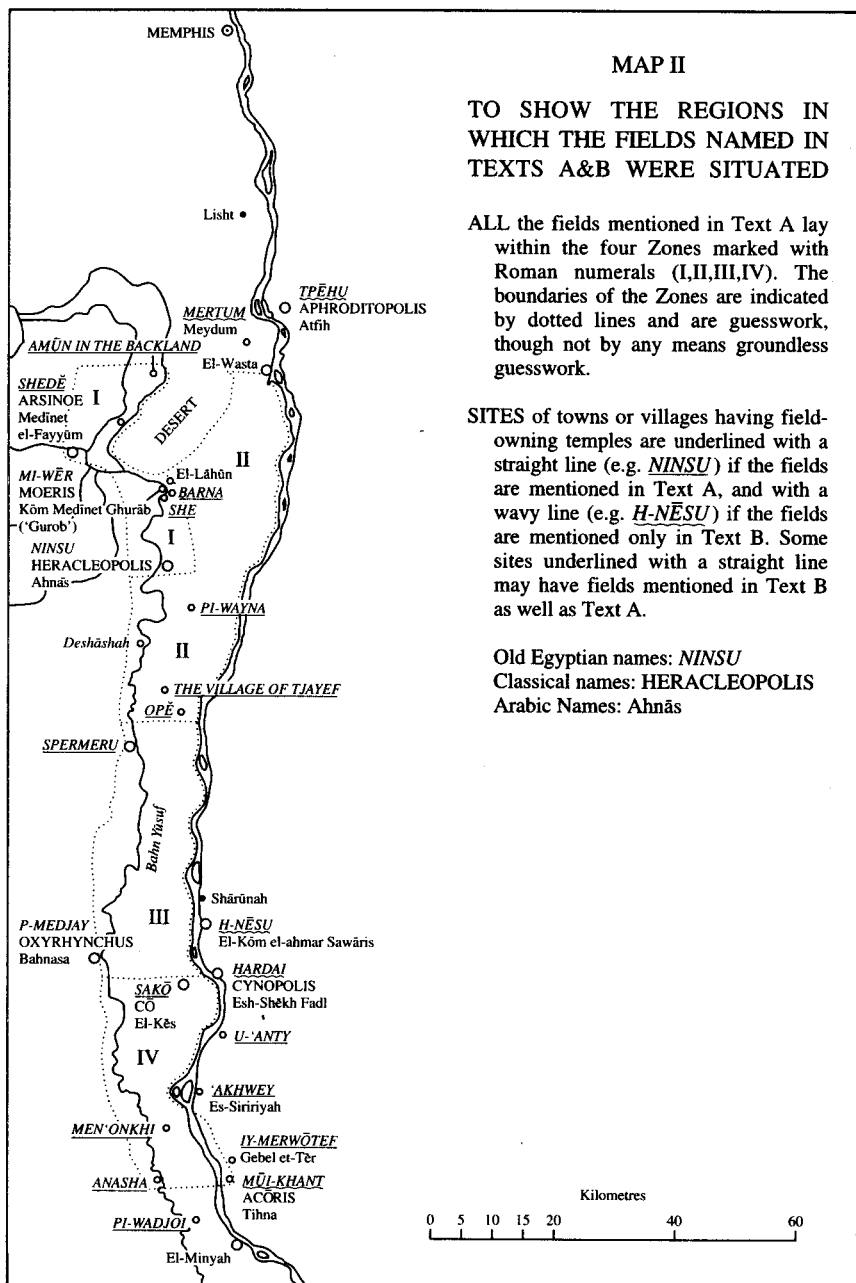


Figure 3.2 Regions of the Wilbour Papyrus.

Source Gardiner (1941–8), between pp. 54 and 55.

them. Each paragraph contains a listing of individual plots organised under a series of subheadings that give the geographic point of reference that fixes the approximate location of a plot. Many of these geographical and topographical reference points probably corresponded to settlements inhabited by the smallholders themselves.⁷

These reference points include both major towns of the region such as Ḥardai (capital, Upper Egyptian nome 17), Ninsu and Tpeḥu (capitals, Upper Egyptian nomes 20 and 22 respectively), and key towns in the New Kingdom provincial administration such as Spermeru, Mi-wēr, and Shē, and also localities that are otherwise completely unknown.

There are three types of paragraphs in Text A: non-apportioning paragraphs that concern plots that may have been cultivated collectively; apportioning paragraphs that concern plots cultivated by individual smallholders; and harem paragraphs that constitute a specialised case and will not be discussed here. Apportioning and non-apportioning paragraphs may be distinguished by differences in both form and content. The 156 non-apportioning paragraphs are easily recognised by the constant recurrence of three sets of red figures in each assessment line. These denote the size of the plot in *arouras*, the rate of assessment, and the expected yield that is the product of the first two figures. The 116 apportioning paragraphs, on the other hand, have assessment lines that follow one of five formats all easily distinguished at a glance from the invariable format of the nonapportioning assessments. Moreover, whereas non-apportioning entries without exception detail plots measured in *arouras*, a small number of apportioning entries concern relatively small plots measured in land-cubits. Each apportioning entry provides details including the individual responsible for the cultivation of the plot, the occupation or title of the smallholder, the size of the plot, and the portion of the plot upon which the revenue in grain owing at the invariable rate of $1\frac{1}{4}$ *h3r* (*khar*) per *aroura* was calculated.

Stuchevsky interpreted the Wilbour Papyrus as a government document that records the assessment of grain produced on state-owned land cultivated either by employees of the state (the non-apportioning paragraphs) or individual smallholders (the apportioning paragraphs). He maintained that non-apportioning paragraphs deal solely with land cultivated collectively under the aegis of a landholding institution by unidentified agricultural labourers ('state cultivators') called *iḥwty* (pl. *iḥwtyw*) under the supervision of a special class of low-level administrators or intermediaries also called *iḥwtyw* ('pseudo-cultivators', 'agents of the fisc'), individually identified in these paragraphs and held responsible for the cultivation of the plots assigned to them. Stuchevsky's 'state cultivators' would have to be considered employees of the state working for a share in the harvest of the plots to which they were assigned. Higher-level *iḥwtyw*

⁷ Gardiner (1941–8), II, 36–55; O'Connor (1972), 690–6.

responsible for administration also would have been state employees, but with greater responsibilities and probably receiving in return a larger share in the harvest. Such individuals would have played the role of intermediaries between the state and the agricultural labourers who did the actual cultivation.

The apportioning paragraphs, on the other hand, deal with land cultivated by or on behalf of smallholders who were allotted (𐎔𐎗, 𐎏𐎗 ^𐎗𐎗𐎗𐎗 'to divide' or 'allot') individual smallholdings by the various landholding institutions that appear to have served an administrative function. These smallholders could be viewed as essentially independent farmers required to pay over to the state, possibly through the medium of the administering institution and its agents of the fisc, a percentage of their harvest considerably smaller than the amount assessed on the plots enumerated in the non-apportioning paragraphs. The difference in assessment owing on plots detailed in the apportioning paragraphs and those detailed in the non-apportioning paragraphs is a strong argument in favour of understanding these paragraphs as denotative of two fundamentally different regimes of cultivation operational at the same time and in the same localities.

The status of the smallholders has long been the subject of intense debate. Gardiner voiced doubt concerning the tenure of these individuals, concluding that their position 'either was, or else closely resembled, that of private owners.'⁸ Stuchevsky, however, firmly asserted that the smallholders of the apportioning paragraphs whose names are preceded by a wide variety of occupational and titular designations are clearly to be identified with individuals referred to in contemporary and near-contemporary texts as *nmḥw*, 'freemen' who 'possess' their own land even though this term never occurs in either Wilbour Text A or B.⁹ Stuchevsky called these smallholders 'virtual owners' or 'private possessors', whose land-tenure may have been, for all practical purposes, the same as private ownership, even though the land technically belonged to the state. By equating these 'virtual owners' with the *nmḥw* of various well-known Ramesside texts such as *P. Valençay I*, a letter complaining of excessive taxation on land that may have been privately owned, Stuchevsky was able to speculate about what their land-tenure may have been like. When we consider that the Wilbour smallholders may not have been full owners, that even slaves (*ḥm*) numbered among them, and that the rights and obligations that accompanied the plots they cultivated were both heritable and alienable, it is abundantly clear from Stuchevsky's valuable discussion that the terminology we possess for describing their status

⁸ Gardiner (1941-8), II, 75 and similarly 55.

⁹ Gardiner (1951), 115-33; Gardiner (1948), xxii, 72-3; Gardiner (1941-8), II, 205-6. See too Gardiner (1941b), 23-9 for the Adoption Papyrus from the reign of Ramesses XI where Renufer (Nenufer) adopts slave-children as her heirs, declaring them to be *nmḥw*, that is, 'freemen of the land of Pharaoh' rather than mere 'servants', i.e., 'slaves'. See also Gardiner (1933), 21; Legrain (1897), 13; Thompson (1941), 74-5; Spiegelberg (1917a), 116; the Will of Naunakhte, I, 2, 1 in Černý (1945), 29-53, pls 8-12.

is abysmally inadequate. Even J. J. Janssen, in his review article summarising the substantive contributions of Stuchevsky that he strongly endorsed, found himself falling back upon terms like 'lease' and 'lessee' in regard to the tenure of these 'virtual owners', concluding that 'complete ownership, however, it never became; the lessee was restricted in his rights, the land remained the property of the state.'¹⁰

It quickly becomes evident that New Kingdom agricultural texts in general and the Wilbour Papyrus in particular raise central problems, particularly the difficulties in defining exactly what a 'farmer' was in Ramesside Egypt and the need to get behind terms like *ihwty* that cannot be successfully translated with current terminology. If we knew the full particulars of the Wilbour Papyrus—who authorised its compilation and for what purpose—we would be in a much stronger position to comment on the system we see in place and the complex relationships between temples, the state, and the individual cultivators. In default of these, we must resort to inference and hypothesis.

A serious problem we encounter with the Wilbour Papyrus at the outset is the difficulty in determining just what land the Wilbour assessors were recording in their survey. Every student of the Wilbour Papyrus has had to grapple with the fact that the land enumerated in the Wilbour Papyrus comprises probably less than 10 per cent of the cultivable land in the region of Middle Egypt under survey. Even accepting Stuchevsky's understanding of the Wilbour Papyrus as a record of state-owned land, there is a need to explain why, if the document describes state-owned land—and there is no evidence for the existence in Egypt of any privately owned or communally owned land—so little of the cultivable land in this region has been included in this survey.¹¹ Fairman concluded on the basis of the date of the Wilbour Papyrus that Text A deals not with land under normal winter (*shitwi*) cultivation, but with lands under summer crops harvested in August.¹² Most of these lands, he maintained, consisted of berm-lands and lands on the sloping Nile banks or along canal-banks that could be artificially irrigated, i.e., *sharāki*-land. The lands enumerated in Text B, however, consisted of what is today called *gezīrah*-land. O'Connor subsequently agreed with Fairman's conclusions, adding that if this hypothesis is correct, we possess only a sample of the cultivable land in this region.¹³

First Edgerton and later Baer opted for the explanation that the small area of land surveyed in the Wilbour Papyrus may be the result of the fact that Wilbour deals exclusively with institutionally owned land, and that, were privately owned land added to the figures, the area cultivated in this region of Middle Egypt

¹⁰ Janssen (1986), 363.

¹¹ 17,324 arouras = 11,260 feddan = 11,711 acres in Text A; not less than 14,420 arouras = 9,373 = 9,748¹ acres in Text B according to Fairman (1953), 119–20.

¹² Fairman (1953), 118–23.

¹³ O'Connor (1972), 690.

would appear appreciably larger.¹⁴ If, however, Stuchevsky was correct in viewing the land enumerated in Wilbour and other documents he discussed as state-owned land, and we have no certain evidence of the existence of privately owned fields, this solution is undermined.¹⁵

Is there any evidence in the Wilbour Papyrus itself that might suggest another plausible explanation for the relatively small area of cultivable land assessed? An interpretation of the Wilbour Papyrus that could address these problems may perhaps be found in the detailed investigation of the occupational data of the Text A smallholders.

Anyone who has even briefly perused the Wilbour Papyrus cannot help but be struck by the presence of numerous women smallholders, all identified by the ubiquitous title 'nh(t) n(t) niwt (𓏲𓏳𓏴𓏵),¹⁶ usually rendered 'citizenship', 'townswoman', or even 'lady'. Closer scrutiny of the apportioning entries reveals the fact that despite their frequent occurrence throughout the apportioning paragraphs of Text A, women smallholders actually account for only 10.8 per cent of the total number of apportioned plots. What leads to the erroneous impression of the ubiquity of women smallholders is their widespread distribution throughout Text A in association with all four geographical zones (derived from the four sections of the text) and most measurement areas, all five institutional groups (Theban, Heliopolitan, Memphite, Other Religious, Secular), most land-holding/administering institutions, as well as both aroura and land-cubit measured plots. Thus it is not easy to determine what, if anything, is distinctive about women smallholders in this document. With no obvious patterns or trends discernible to the unassisted eye, some assistance is necessary to coax from the text what generalisations, if any, can be made about land-tenure among women. Cross-tabulation analysis using the social science program SPSS¹⁷ provides a means of determining which relationships among the Wilbour variables are, in fact, both statistically significant and substantively important. This is our best hope for understanding how women smallholders fit into the land-tenure system operative in Middle Egypt during the Ramesside period and what variables were most important.

Cross-tabulation analysis turning on the variable of gender of smallholder fails to uncover any major trends among the data. This suggests the applicability of one of two scenarios which at first sight appear diametrically opposed. It is possible, on the one hand, that land-tenure among women smallholders was so uncommon a phenomenon and so random and unpredictable in its occurrence

¹⁴ Edgerton (1950), 300-1; Baer (1962), 40, n. 98.

¹⁵ Stuchevsky (summarised in Janssen (1986)) attempted to compare agriculturalists in other broadly contemporary texts with the 'state cultivators' or 'private possessors' of the Wilbour Papyrus.

¹⁶ The feminine *t* usually drops out so that we have simply 'nh n niwt. Even when the feminine *t* is written ('nh*t*), the preposition is still *n* instead of *nt*.

¹⁷ Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. See *SPSS-X User's Guide* (1987), 3rd edn.

that no clear patterns emerge to distinguish landholding on the part of women from landholding on the part of men. On the other hand, it appears equally possible that land-tenure among women smallholders was so unremarkable and ordinary an occurrence that no particular qualifications or conditions affected their land-tenure to reveal any really distinctive patterns. Upon reflection, however, the two scenarios could be viewed as complementary, as merely two sides of a single coin. It should be kept in mind that this has no relevance to the actual numbers involved or the proportion of women among the smallholders of Text A. The cross-tabulation of gender of smallholder by geographic location (measurement area of plot) provides one minor trend which might suggest a solution. We find that the plots of women smallholders tend to cluster in certain predictable measurement areas when compared with the plots of men smallholders. Thus, certain measurement areas exhibit higher frequencies of plots for which women smallholders were held accountable than would be expected on the basis of the absolute and relative frequencies of men and women smallholders in the Wilbour document as a whole. Clearly, there is reason to look more closely into the geographic distribution of the plots of women smallholders in Text A. Even a weak trend for the plots of women smallholders to cluster in certain measurement areas requires some attempt at explanation.

Altogether the five highest-frequency occupations comprise just greater than 66 per cent of the apportioning entries: stablemaster (*ḥry iḥw*) (22.3 per cent), soldier or infantryman (*w'w*) (12.0 per cent), priest (*w'b*) (11.8 per cent), *'nh(t) n niwt* (10.8 per cent), and *iḥwty* ('cultivator') (9.7 per cent). Since women smallholders account for 10.8 per cent of the apportioning entries, a percentage that is just slightly higher than that of individuals expressly identified as *iḥwtyw*, the women smallholders cannot be lightly dismissed. Any interpretation of the Wilbour Papyrus must explain the presence of so many women smallholders as well as the pattern of their landholding. It must also account for the relatively low frequencies of *iḥwty*. The key to understanding these statistics may lie in the relatively high frequencies of military and military-related occupations among the smallholders in association with women smallholders.

The military was undeniably an important component of New Kingdom landholding in Middle Egypt, tracing back to the custom well-established in the Eighteenth Dynasty of rewarding the military with gifts of cultivable land.¹⁸ Gardiner pointed out that the names of four measurement areas in Wilbour suggest the settlement of military or semi-military classes in these areas at some time in their history.¹⁹ Of these, the Village (*t3 whyt*) of the Soldiers (A35,45; 36,12) is found in Text A.

Subsequently, O'Connor examined the distribution of the holdings of various

¹⁸ The Inscription of Mose in Gardiner (1905) and Gaballa (1977).

¹⁹ Gardiner (1941-8), II, 33.

occupations over the four zones of Text A, noting that 'a fairly clear-cut distribution pattern emerges.'²⁰ He noted, for example, that 'ladies' predominate in zones II and IV; whereas soldiers occur most frequently in zone III, and stablemasters predominate in zones II, III, and IV. Focusing on soldiers, he interpreted their frequent occurrence in zone III and, to a lesser extent, zone IV as 'an unexpectedly concrete illustration of the securely attested but poorly documented existence of New Kingdom settlements for veterans and their families.'²¹ O'Connor based his hypothesis upon the existence of various strategic fortresses and garrisons belonging to the military and located both in Egypt and her provinces. The title *hry pdt*, 'commander of a host', was one of the highest-ranking military offices during the New Kingdom, just below that of general.²² Men of this rank are sometimes listed with the epithet 'of the garrison' or with the name of a geographical locality appended to their names. While the title *hry pdt* does not occur in Wilbour, there are measurement areas that may have been garrisons. These measurement areas include those designated *p3 htm*, 'the fortress', *p3 sg(3) n*, 'the keep of' and *bhn*, 'the castle'. Thus, there are measurement areas that might well correspond to military settlements.

Cross-tabulation analysis of the four zones of plot location and the occupation or title of smallholder indicates that although the relationship between these variables is statistically significant, there is no clear-cut pattern. The distribution pattern O'Connor identified is therefore at best a minor trend. What we should be looking for are multiple associations in which two, three, or more occupations in joint association produce a more complicated patterning. This is what we see when we examine measurement areas where women smallholders occur in association with military and military-related occupations.²³ Of these measurement areas, Sakō and Men'onkh in zone IV, Pi-Wayna in zone II, and the Village of Inroyshes in zone I have relatively high frequencies of women small-

²⁰ O'Connor (1972), 693.

²¹ O'Connor (1972), 695.

²² Schulman (1964), 53-6 with references to individual texts.

²³ Four measurement areas have frequencies of greater than 10 women smallholders and therefore provide useful examples. These measurement areas include in declining magnitude of frequency of women smallholders: Sakō in zone (Section) IV, where women account for 22 cases or 24.7% of the plots (10.3% of the apportioning entries for women smallholders); Men'onkh also in zone (Section) IV, where women account for 13 cases or 16.0% of the plots (6.1% of the apportioning entries for women smallholders); The Village of Inroyshes in zone (Section) I, where women account for 12 cases or 24.5% of the plots (5.6% of the apportioning entries for women smallholders); and Pi-Wayna in zone (Section) II, where women account for 10 cases or 33.3% of the plots (4.7% of the apportioning entries for women smallholders). Zone (Section) III, measurement areas with somewhat lower frequencies of *'nh(t) n niwt* include both Spermeru and Sharopé, each with a frequency of 8 women smallholders. Since Section I (zone I) of Text A is incomplete and therefore of limited use, the frequency distribution for the other three Sections (zones) must be consulted. This indicates that women smallholders were fairly evenly distributed throughout the extent of the Wilbour assessment area as represented by the three north-south geographical zones.

holders. Spermeru and Sharopē in zone III are also noteworthy even though they evidence slightly lower frequencies of women smallholders. Sakō, Spermeru, and Sharopē particularly attract our attention as measurement areas with relatively high frequencies of both military and military-related occupations, including *hry ihw*, 'stablemaster', and *w'w*, 'soldier'—occupations that have the highest absolute and adjusted relative frequencies among the fifty-four occupations and titles of smallholders.²⁴ These measurement areas, moreover, all reveal relatively low frequencies of smallholders identified simply as *ihwty*, 'cultivator'.

Does Wilbour itself offer any clues to explain the occupational profile of the smallholders? Gardiner pointed out that instances among the occurrences of women smallholders to which the note *nty mt* 'who is dead' is appended (e.g., A36,38.45; 67,38) in combination with the phrase *m-drt msw.s* '(cultivated) by the hand of her children' (A59,12.24) provide 'presumptive evidence of the continuance of the property in the same family for at least three generations.'²⁵ The phrase *hn' snw.f(s)*, 'together with his (or her) brothers (brethren)', which may follow the names of male or female smallholders, may be similarly interpreted as evidence of the division of property among heirs. Thus there is little doubt that some of the women named in Text A as smallholders are widows (*h3rt* or *h3rt*), although they are never specifically identified as such. But what of the vast majority of women smallholders whose names are followed by no explanatory information? How is their presence in this list to be understood? Does the designation *'nh(t) n niwt* itself offer any clues?

The title *'nh(t) n niwt* (*Wb.* I, 201) is usually rendered 'citizenship' or 'townswoman' as a result of a literal translation, 'living (female) being of the city'; comparable certainly to the seldom-occurring male form *'nh(t) n niwt*.²⁶ The woman's title goes back to the Middle Kingdom where it occurs in the abbreviated form *'nh(t)*. The correct understanding may be that of 'person', based upon the meaning of the male term *'nh*, which goes back to the Old Kingdom

²⁴ We include the occupation *hry ihw* among the military occupations even though, according to Schulman (1964), 53, §124, the duties and activities of the stablemaster appear to indicate that he had no active military role, and it is not certain whether the stablemaster was really a military officer in the lists of rank where the title occurs. A number of texts indicate that the responsibilities of stablemasters varied and suggest that there were different grades of stablemasters with or without actual military rank. Even those stablemasters identified as belonging 'to the Residence' or 'of the Residence' would probably have been military personnel since a portion of the royal residence would serve as the facility for the maintenance of horses and chariots. There are also several references to stablemasters serving abroad with the military in the Late Egyptian Miscellanies. (Schulman (1964), 51–2, §121; see Gardiner (1937) with translations in Caminos (1954)). Thus these stablemasters were certainly associated with the military even if they did not possess actual military rank.

²⁵ Gardiner (1941–8), II, 76.

²⁶ See bibliography in Allam (1973), 60, n. 9; Ward (1986), 61–5 and (1982), nos. 615–16, 75–6.

and is also documented in the Middle Kingdom with the meaning 'freeman'.²⁷ This would lead to the conclusion that the feminine form of the term, 'nh(t)', can be expected to have the meaning 'freewoman'.

Pestman, in his study of Egyptian marriage, states that the title 'nh(t) n niwt' denoted a married or widowed woman in the New Kingdom.²⁸ We know of no example of an unmarried woman who is called an 'nh(t) n niwt'. Women called 'nh(t) n niwt' would have been called hmt, 'wife (of)', had it been necessary to provide more precise identification by means of their husband's name.²⁹ Since the women smallholders in the Wilbour apportioning paragraphs are never described as hmt, we might conclude that these women smallholders were landholders in their own right whose names probably occurred in the land registers.

There are many contemporary and near contemporary occurrences of the title 'nh(t) n niwt' that clearly identify the women as wives.³⁰ Like the Wilbour Papyrus, these documents are written in hieratic. As such, they contrast with monumental inscriptions written in hieroglyphic which are the usual epigraphic sources for the woman's title nbt-pr ($\overline{\text{w}} \overline{\text{t}}$) (Wb. I, 512), literally, 'mistress of the house'. Nbt-pr occurs as a title for married women from the Middle Kingdom onwards down to the Ptolemaic period.³¹ It appears to identify a woman with respect to the household of which she was not only a part, but the actual chatelaine by virtue of marriage.³² Thus, the title nbt-pr would not apply to either concubines or slave-women. Evidence of the titles borne by women in Theban tombs from the Eighteenth Dynasty further suggests that women with the title nbt-pr were a close approximation of what we would today call a 'housewife', that is, women whose frequent lack of other titles indicates that they did not work outside the home and whose primary responsibility and, indeed, identity were derived from their position as literally, 'mistress of the house'.³³ Since the terms nbt-pr and 'nh(t) n niwt' both normally appear to refer to married or widowed women who are also hmt, but do not occur side by side in any one inscription, the logical question is whether these terms are not virtual synonyms with different frames of reference that govern their usage.

In contrast to nbt-pr, the title 'nh(t) n niwt' occurs in legal, juridical, and economic documents written in customary hieratic. Like nbt-pr, 'nh(t) n niwt' may also be found alongside the term hmt, 'wife'. No woman identified as 'nh(t) n

²⁷ Goedicke (1967), 219 cited in Ward (1986), 65.

²⁸ Pestman (1961), 11, n. 2; see too 3, n. 6 for reference to P. Mayer A 13c, 6-7 (20th Dynasty); Ward (1986), 68.

²⁹ Ward (1986), 68.

³⁰ For example, Pestman (1961), 3, n. 6, 11, n. 2; Allam (1973), 214-17; Černý (1945), 44, n. 2; Peet (1930), 171-5; McDowell (1990), 215.

³¹ Pestman (1961), 11, n. 1; Ward (1982), 99. Wb. I, 512 errs in dating the title back to the Old Kingdom. The *Belegstellen* I, 512, 9 corrects this error.

³² Pflüger (1947), 129 stated that in Middle Kingdom inscriptions the title was borne by any female family member. See too Spiegelberg (1917b), 109, n. 6: '*Herrin des Vermögens*'.

³³ Whale (1989).

niwt in these texts is also ascribed a title or office indicative of an active or even honorific role outside the home.³⁴ Thus both *nbt-pr* and *'nh(t) n niwt* appear to pertain to women whose primary role in society was that of a housewife and therefore may be considered equivalent within their respective frames of reference even though a *nbt-pr* may have another title (often *šm'yt*, 'singer'³⁵). *Nbt-pr* identifies such women in hieroglyphic monumental inscriptions, whereas *'nh(t) n niwt* identifies such women in hieratic documents.

The Memphite tomb-chapel of Mose, which dates to the reign of Ramesses II, provides evidence, not previously deployed in this context so far as I know, that the two terms are roughly equivalent within their respective frames of reference and usually refer to women whose primary occupation was that of homemaker.³⁶ These inscriptions are doubly important because they provide the most detailed documentation for the custom of rewarding military veterans with plots of land that were heritable. The owner of the tomb celebrates his victory in winning a legal battle for control of property gifted to his ancestor, a ship's captain (*imy-r 'h'w*), by Aḥmose I as a reward for outstanding military service in the famous Legal Text of the tomb-chapel. This text provides a singular instance of the occurrence of the title *'nh n niwt* to describe the mother of Mose, who is called simply *nbt-pr* in the genealogical texts. The context, it appears, dictates the appropriate term of reference. When the identity and therefore status of a woman *vis-à-vis* the owner of the tomb was in question, it was appropriate to refer to her by both the terms *hmt* and *nbt-pr* that fixed her role in the marriage and the household. When it was a matter of public concern, as was the case with a legal matter that affected several families and had to be settled in court, the appropriate term of reference was *'nh n niwt*, a title that emphasised the individual's status as a legal person in her own right, a member of the community with certain attendant rights and obligations.³⁷

³⁴ So *Wb. I*, 201: "Städterin, Bürgerin" an Stelle eines Titels vor Frauennamen' in contrast to *nbt-pr* in *Wb. I*, 512 '... als Titel der Ehefrau ... allein oder neben anderen Titeln, neben Verwandtschaftsbezeichnungen u.a.'

³⁵ After *nbt-pr*, *šm'yt* is the most common woman's title in New Kingdom Theban tomb inscriptions. It was used by wives of the highest officials as well as the wives and daughters of the workmen of the Theban Necropolis at Deir el-Medina. It is not clear whether all women with this title had the same responsibilities or whether the title simply had become more or less customary for élite women without denoting any substantive responsibilities. We do not even know whether these women were paid for their services. See Robins (1993), 145–6, 149. Janssen (personal communication) once expressed the opinion that women with this title may have been comparable to modern day housewives who sing in the church choir on Sundays.

³⁶ Gardiner (1905) and Gaballa (1977).

³⁷ Černý (1945), 44, n. 2 understood *'nh(t) n niwt* as a freewoman in contrast to a slave or any other woman in servitude to another on the evidence of the Will of Naunakhte, where Naunakhte states that she is a *nmh* or 'freewoman' of the land of Pharaoh, and various inscriptions from Deir el-Medina where the workmen's wives are commonly referred to as *'nh(t) n niwt*, once in contrast to *hmt*, 'slave'. But see Bakir (1952), 85–6 for the evidence of Cairo Stela 27/24 6/3, dating to the late Ramesside period, where the *'nh(t) n niwt* Shedēse identified as a *hmt*, possesses land.

Thus the tomb-chapel of Mose affords us two modes of referring to the same woman: a title that placed her within the family and household, and a title that emphasised her status as an adult member of the larger community, a responsible participant in public life. Of Mose's female relations mentioned in the genealogical inscriptions, only his wife Mutnofret and Tiyt, whose relationship to Mose is uncertain, held a title indicative of an office (*šm'yt*) that might have involved them in activities outside the home, but to what extent we cannot say. Nubnofret, the mother of Mose, however, held no titles. She was simply a *nbt-pr* in the genealogical inscriptions and an *'nh n ni'wt* in the Legal Text. As *nbt-pr* or as *'nh n ni'wt*, Nubnofret was surely an ancient Egyptian housewife. It is unfortunate that women styled *šm'yt* are not mentioned in the Legal Text as we have it. Had they been mentioned, we could have observed whether their title *šm'yt* would have replaced *'nh n ni'wt*.

Since the women smallholders of the Wilbour Papyrus are never called anything but *'nh(t) n ni'wt*, there is a strong implication that these women were married women or widows whose primary occupation was that of housewife. If they had claim to titles or offices, it is likely that these titles or offices would have been provided as they are, for example, in the Twentieth-Dynasty Late Ramesside Letters where scribes of the Necropolis correspond with each other and their wives—the latter consistently identified as singers (*šm'yt*)—concerning matters both personal and professional back home in Thebes,³⁸ and in the Turin Taxation Papyrus where a singer of Amun and her husband, the scribe of the Necropolis, receive grain payments intended for the magazines of Thebes.³⁹ Thus, in day-to-day correspondence as in administrative records, ancient Egyptian women of the New Kingdom were ordinarily accorded the dignities of their office(s).⁴⁰ We can expect that there were exceptions to this pattern, but the exceptions need not invalidate what may have been a common practice.

It is significant that there is no clear indication in the Wilbour Papyrus that the women smallholders did not enjoy the same position as the men smallholders apart from a higher proportion of occurrences of the phrases *hn' snw.f(s)* and *m-drt msw.s(f)*. It seems clear that women styled *'nh(t) n ni'wt* were free to own, transfer, or transmit property rights and obligations like the men smallholders identified in the apportioning entries. If, moreover, the smallholders are to be identified with *nmḥw*, we have only to look at the case of a well-known *nmḥ*, the *'nh n ni'wt* Naunakhte, the author of a famous will, to see a widowed woman

³⁸ See text in Černý (1939) with translation in Wente (1967).

³⁹ Gardiner (1941b), 22–37. See text in Gardiner (1948), xiii–xiv, 35–44. The *šm'yt* Hentowē is never called the wife (*hmt*) of her co-worker and husband Nesamenopē.

⁴⁰ Ward (1986), 21 noted that it is possible that many women portrayed on stelae may have held religious or other titles that are not recorded either for lack of space—which may be the case in some instances—or because women usually held subordinate positions. In the end, he accepted the view that women during the Middle Kingdom held few temple positions.

of property having full rein over its disposition, including the real estate inherited from her first husband.⁴¹ Whatever their genealogical particulars, the women smallholders in the Wilbour Papyrus must have shouldered responsibility and they therefore command attention in their own right.

The peculiar distribution of the plots of women smallholders throughout the 185 measurement areas of Text A suggests that the explanation of many of the plots ascribed to women lies in the extraordinarily high numbers of military and military-related men smallholders who cultivate plots in close proximity. While cross-tabulation analysis of the relevant variable failed to confirm the hypothesis that certain zones were dominated by significant concentrations of particular occupations—notably women, soldiers, and stablemasters—Gardiner and O'Connor were certainly correct in identifying some Wilbour measurement areas as military settlements, especially when stablemaster is considered a military occupation. This allows us to suggest the possibility that the women smallholders were either the widows of military men who inherited responsibility for the payment of the assessed quantities of grain from their harvest, or the wives of military men who were currently in active service. We are unable to establish that they could have been unmarried daughters because of the apparent restriction of the title *'nh(t) n ni'wt* to married women, but there is no reason why some of them could not have been married daughters. The smattering of a variety of other occupations in these distinctive Text A settlements, including artisans, priests, prophets, and scribes, may reflect the occupational profile we might expect to find in settlements originally established for the military as the rights to plots allotted to military men were inherited by their children and grandchildren. These children (or other descendants) may have either completed their military service and gone on to follow other occupations, or were never in military service at all. Thus measurement areas that evidence a wider variety of occupations of smallholders may have been older military settlements than those that evidence a predominance of military occupations. Over time we can expect the occupational profile of settlements originally established for military veterans to change substantially.

A look at the frequencies for both size of plot and assessment value placed upon the plots of smallholders in Wilbour suggests the existence of a system that governed both the size of the plots allocated and the assessment values that determined the quantities of grain owing on them.⁴² It is surely no accident that starting from the modal size of 5 arouras (752 cases, 51.8 per cent), plot sizes show a pattern of doubling up to a size of 80 arouras, and at each stage in the doubling, there is a clustering of plots that suggests that the doubling is part of a larger plan. Plots of 3 arouras appear to be a significant departure from the

⁴¹ Černý (1945), 29–53, pls 8–12.

⁴² Katary (1989), 78–80, 309–11.

doubling since the 339 plots of 3 arouras comprise 23.4 per cent of the assessed aroura-measured plots with data preserved. Since 195 of these plots (58.6 per cent) are ascribed to *w'w*, and these plots comprise 90.3 per cent of the assessed aroura-measured plots held by them, it is clear that 3 arouras is an established size of plot to be associated with *w'w* and women smallholders, the latter of whom account for an additional 39 plots (11.7 per cent). However, since none of the entries for assessed aroura-measured plots contain fractions in the size of plot, it is possible that 3 arouras is, in fact, the plot size 2 arouras rounded up to avoid the fraction. As such, it would fit perfectly into the doubling pattern.

Assessment value also reveals a doubling pattern up to 2 arouras, at which point 93.8 per cent of the cases are accounted for. With the assessment value $2\frac{1}{2}$ arouras, there is again a doubling at 5 arouras. Since the assessment values vary over a range from $\frac{1}{4}$ aroura to $20\frac{1}{2}\frac{1}{4}$ arouras and therefore have a considerably smaller range of values than was the case with plot size, fractions occur frequently in assessment values and are, in fact, more common than whole values. The doubling pattern in assessment value is less pronounced than in the case of size of plot, but this is probably related to the fact that there are several possible assessment values for some sizes of plot. The doubling pattern would be consistent with a system of land allocation in which allotments were made for a fairly homogeneous body of smallholders differentiated, to a considerable extent, by military rank and title, which played a key role in determining both the size of a plot and its assessment.

Further evidence that the women smallholders of the Wilbour Papyrus were wives, widows, or even daughters of military men lies in the fact that both plot size and assessment of aroura-measured plots held by these women smallholders are perfectly consistent with those of the most frequently occurring military occupations: *w'w* (3 arouras) and *hry ihw* (5 arouras). Women smallholders are seldom ascribed plots of any other size than 3 or 5 arouras. Both the assessment values $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ aroura occur most frequently among stablemasters, soldiers, and women smallholders. As assessment values increase, *w'w* drops sharply in its frequencies. At $2\frac{1}{2}$ and 5 arouras, only the occupation *ihwty* has high frequencies (61.1 per cent and 55.6 per cent of the cases respectively).

Although there is little by way of quantitative data for plots awarded to the military during the New Kingdom, there are several texts that bear mention. The Inscription of Mose unfortunately proves disappointing since the text is broken where the size of the plot is given (N4). The 13 arouras mentioned later in the text (N19) probably comprised only a portion of the original estate awarded to Khay together with trusteeship for the estate after he succeeded in falsifying the official land registers. The estate was therefore considerably larger than the plots allotted to the vast majority of soldiers and stablemasters in Wilbour. There are, however, in Wilbour some large plots ascribed to individuals with military rank, especially charioteers.

The Louvre Leather Fragments provide a list of what at first appear to be very small aroura-measured plots in a stereotyped format reminiscent of the Wilbour apportioning entries.⁴³ The broken condition of the text, both at the beginning where the House of Amun is mentioned as participant in the measurement (?) of these plots, and throughout the individual entries (leaving only two complete entries), limits the usefulness of the data. The plots enumerated appear to vary in size from $\frac{1}{8}$ aroura to 3 arouras and are assessed at the standard rate of $1\frac{1}{4}$ sacks ($\text{ft} \text{ } \overset{\circ}{\text{O}}$) per aroura as, for example:

(I, a, 5) The soldier Pentwēre, son of Neferronpě, $\frac{1}{2} \frac{1}{4}$ [= $\frac{3}{4}$] aroura, at [?] $1\frac{1}{4}$ sacks.

(I, a, 6) The soldier Setmosč, son of H̄uy, 1 aroura, at [?] $1\frac{1}{4}$ sacks.

The plots are listed as cultivated by individuals identified as soldiers (*w'w*), coppersmiths (*hmty*), inlayers of faience (?) (*nšdy*), bringers of wood (*inw ht*), distributors of rations (*šd di'w*), etc. Both Gardiner and Malinine considered the smallholders of these small plots to be comparable to the smallholders of the Wilbour apportioning paragraphs although only one aroura value is given for each plot.⁴⁴ If the aroura figure in each entry can be established as the assessed portion of the plot rather than the size of the plot, the plots may indeed be comparable to those of the apportioning entries and the occurrence of *w'w* especially meaningful. In Wilbour, soldiers are found to occur in association with an assessment value of 1 aroura on both plots of 3 and 5 arouras in size (A37,26; 45,3,6; 46,5; 56,21?).

Other New Kingdom texts that mention awards of land to military veterans are stelae and tomb autobiographies. From the Eighteenth Dynasty comes the autobiography of Aḥmose, son of Ebana where it is said:

Thereupon I was given five people plus a share of [?] (*hr dniw*) five arouras of fields in my city, and it was done for the entire ship's contingent likewise. (*Urk* IV, 6)⁴⁵

Here, not only does the plot size of 5 arouras accord perfectly with evidence of the Wilbour Papyrus, but the author chanced to give us the additional valuable information that each member of the entire ship's contingent was treated similarly. This suggests the existence of a coherent policy in the allocation of land grants to military veterans.

Also from the Eighteenth Dynasty is Stela Berlin 14994 that records the southern boundary of 'the fields that were given (2) as a favour from the king to the chariot-warrior (3) of His Majesty, Nekry, [being] 150 arouras.'⁴⁶ While this is

⁴³ Gardiner (1948), xix-xx, 60-3; Gardiner (1941-8), II, 208-9; Gardiner (1941), 71.

⁴⁴ Gardiner (1941-8), II, 208-9; Malinine (1959), 219.

⁴⁵ Schulman (1964), 88, no. 6.

⁴⁶ Schulman (1964), 98, no. 80.

an extremely large plot by Wilbour standards, it is not inconceivably huge, since charioteers are ascribed some rather big plots. Moreover, the award of this plot to Nekry by the king himself suggests that this was not a customary gift of land, but a special award recognising some outstanding achievement or arising from unspecified unusual circumstances.

It is also significant that it is in the apportioning paragraphs rather than the non-apportioning paragraphs that women smallholders make their appearance. If Stuchevsky was correct, non-apportioning paragraphs identify plots cultivated collectively on behalf of landholding institutions by unidentified field-labourers (*iḥwtyw*) under the direction of a special class of *iḥwtyw* individually identified in these paragraphs and held responsible for their cultivation. No *'nh(t) n niwt* occurs in the non-apportioning paragraphs in any supervisory role whatever. Nor are any of the unidentified *iḥwtyw* enumerated there apparently female, since the pronominal suffix after the word *3ḥ(t)*, 'field', that begins the ordinary non-apportioning entry is consistently *f* (field cultivated by *him*).

The role and status of these *iḥwtyw* help to define that of the women smallholders, and can be clarified by considering that the 118 corresponding *Pōsh* (from the verb *pš*) entries in Texts A and B that denote double-entry bookkeeping for plots cultivated by one institution on behalf of another in a mutually beneficial relationship usually involve individuals identified as *iḥwty* (63.7 per cent).⁴⁷ Moreover, the 79 *Pōsh* B entries ascribed to *iḥwtyw* account for 81.4 per cent of the apportioning entries ascribed to *iḥwtyw*. This is strong evidence that the great majority of *iḥwtyw* in the apportioning paragraphs played a very different role in the land-tenure system from that of the overwhelming majority of smallholders. Only *rwḏw*, 'agent', and *sš*, 'scribe', account for a substantial number of *Pōsh* B entries. Are the corresponding *Pōsh* A and B entries, like the ordinary non-apportioning entries, perhaps to be viewed as plots available for allocation to individual smallholders at some future date and, in the meantime, cultivated directly by employees of the landholding institutions held responsible for the payment of revenue owing on them? Such a scenario is a distinct possibility.

Evidence of Wilbour Text B may also be taken into consideration. Text B pertains exclusively to *khato*-land and *minē*-land of Pharaoh, some plots of which correspond to land in Text A enumerated in the non-apportioning paragraphs.

⁴⁷ The *Pōsh* A entries occur in the non-apportioning paragraphs, whereas the *Pōsh* B entries occur in the apportioning paragraphs. Each set of corresponding entries concerns the exact same plot as indicated by the paragraph headings naming the institutions involved, the plot location, the name of the responsible party, and the size of the plot in aouras. See Gardiner (1941–8), II, 57–9 for his explanation of these peculiar inter-institutional assessments and Janssen (1986), 354, 357–8 for details of how Stuchevsky understood these entries where both women and the military occur only rarely. The third type of *Pōsh* entry, *Pōsh* C, numbers only 37 and denotes a special type of entry where a plot is apportioned for a deity 'by the hand of' (*m-ḏrt*) an individual who is usually a *iḥwty* or a priest.

The cultivators of such lands are male, as are the officials responsible for the cultivation of the plots. The collective-style cultivation that Stuchevsky argued characterised both the plots of the non-apportioning paragraphs and Text B would appear to rule out anyone but full-time cultivators. The fact that no women smallholders are encountered in Text B in any role whatever indicates that such women were not in the business of running or even participating in large-scale cultivation. This is further evidence that the Wilbour women smallholders were probably not employed outside the home.

Another New Kingdom text that may have a bearing on the combination of occupations that occurs in the apportioning entries of the Wilbour Papyrus is the Eighteenth-Dynasty Coronation Decree of Haremḥab. This document mentions the supplying of the temples of Egypt with *w'b*-priests and lector-priests 'from the pick of the army ('home troops') (*mnf3t*), assigning them fields and herds' (*Urk* IV, 2120, 25).⁴⁸ Although no data for size of plot or assessment are provided, the connection between army veterans and the staff of Egyptian temples is significant and may provide the missing link between temples and the military. This assumes, of course, that Haremḥab's policy of providing military veterans with clerical positions was emulated by later pharaohs who also required the support of the military to achieve their goals. If so, this may help explain the administrative role of temples in the Wilbour Papyrus where so many military men are enumerated in company with smallholders of priestly office. Some of these priests and prophets may have been military veterans, while others may have been the descendants of such veterans. Such a system is bound to have left some trace of its existence in the titles of priests and prophets over the course of their careers.

Conclusion

The attempt has been made here to discern, with the aid of statistical analysis, land-distribution patterns in the Wilbour Papyrus that are worthy of detailed examination in order to evaluate what appear to be anomalies in the occupational profile of the smallholders. We have been able to offer some speculations concerning the land-tenure system operative in the Ramesside period that appear reasonable on present evidence. Stuchevsky's insightful speculations concerning the complex relationships between institutions, his understanding of the term *ihwty*, and his identification of smallholders with *nmhw* go a long way towards a resolution of the problems that have plagued scholars since Gardiner's publication of Wilbour. These valuable insights are also in the main compatible with

⁴⁸ Gardiner (1953), 16 (25) and 21, n. 3j. He points out that this phrase points to Haremḥab's rule as 'essentially military'. So too Schulman (1964), 96, no. 61 understands this line. See too Murnane (1995), 233.

the line of interpretation proposed here. This is novel in that it relies on the use of statistical analysis to generate a hypothesis that will explain how women smallholders fit into a land-tenure system so heavily dominated by the military, that is, as wives and widows who might inherit land and cultivate it or have it cultivated for them, or who cultivate it in the absence of husbands currently in service. Important to my understanding of the joint occurrence of women and military smallholders is the issue of the legal status of the crucial women's title 'nh(t) n ni'wt which I have tried to elucidate by deploying, for the first time as far as I know, the evidence of the Nineteenth-Dynasty Inscription of Mose.

While no one piece of evidence, in and of itself, is sufficiently strong to prove this interpretation, there are numerous fragments of evidence suggesting that a primary motivation behind the Wilbour Papyrus was the need to keep track of assessments on plots awarded to military men, their families, and their descendants, as well as other landholdings available for allotment to such smallholders, cultivated under the aegis of both temples and secular institutions. In sum, this evidence is compelling and demands further investigation. In no case can we afford to overlook either the military component of the land-tenure system documented in the Wilbour Papyrus or the women smallholders.

If the Wilbour Papyrus bears interpretation along these lines, we will also have made some progress towards an understanding of the land-tenure system that underlies a wide variety of contemporary and near contemporary texts. We need to reconsider in this light some recently discussed documents of later date which offer evidence for the size and conditions of tenure of plots held by soldiers.⁴⁹ A closer examination of the roles that military personnel, their wives, widows, and descendants have played in land-tenure in later periods would also help to establish whether such a system of land allocation was as viable in the longer term as it appears to have been in the heady days of the New Kingdom when empire-building required the support of a strong military and tangible reward for the service of veterans. Such a consideration of later texts may in turn elucidate problems in the Wilbour Papyrus that appear intractable in the light of our limited knowledge of the Ramesside Egyptian economy.

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⁴⁹ Principally *P. Reinhardt* (Vleeming (1993), esp. 71-5), and *P. Prachov* (see Gasse (1988), I, 206-29 and cf. Vleeming (1993), 79-80). Both these texts may concern lands in the domain of the Temple of Amon at Karnak.

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