Opposite ancient Thebes, on the western bank of the Nile and at some distance from it, behind the hill of Qurnet Mura‘i, is situated a small valley, usually known as Deir el-Medina after a long vanished Coptic monastery. Here there are still to be seen the remains of a settlement where, during the New Kingdom, lived the workmen who cut and decorated the famous tombs of the pharaohs and those of their wives and children and high officials. Nearby, at the foot of the steep escarpment of the Libyan desert, the workmen built their own tombs, which with their modest means they endeavoured to decorate in the same way as they were used to do those of their masters. Both the settlement (either a “village”, since it contained no more than about 70 houses, or a small “town”, since the main part of it was surrounded by a wall) and its necropolis were excavated by the French Archaeological Institute, Cairo between 1922 and 1951. From the tombs and the houses and from some neighbouring chapels where the workmen used to worship their particular deities, in short from all over the valley there have come a great number of stelae, on which the workmen pay tribute in word and picture to their divine protectors. Apart from what they reveal of personal piety, these stelae also provide us with information about the family relationships of their original owners.

But if in consequence we already know about the community and
its life we are still better acquainted with it through the mass of ostraca—both actual potsherds and flakes of limestone, commonly too called ostraca in Egypt—on which the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina made notes in ink about all kinds of minor matters connected with their daily life. Papyri, on the other hand, are somewhat rarer, since the material seems to have been too costly for ordinary use, and was employed as a writing-material only for more important matters, such as official notes of the payment of wages, records of legal proceedings, etc. Some papyri of this kind were found in the nineteenth century, but hardly ever, unfortunately, in official excavations, so that their origin remains for the most part unknown and can only be inferred from the contents. One such papyrus, which has been in the Cairo Museum for more than a century is the main object of the present study.

The text, now numbered as Pap. Cairo 58 092, was originally published under its former name of Pap. Bulaq X by Mariette, who produced a very fine facsimile of it. The first, and until now the only comprehensive study with a translation and commentary is that of Spiegelberg which appeared in 1892. Though isolated words and phrases are occasionally cited, and references to the text occur also in studies of Egyptian law, there is to our knowledge only one more recent overall translation, the work of Helck.

On the verso of Pap. Bulaq X there is a detailed description of an inheritance consisting of a number of different properties. This part of the text is of great importance since it enables us to gain some insight into the property of a necropolis workman, though, as will

1) We shall here retain the older name, by which it is generally known to Egyptologists.
2) A. Mariette, Les papyri égyptiens du musée de Boulaq, publiés en facsimilé, tome 1-3, Paris 1871-1876. Pap. Bulaq X is to be found in part II, pls. 1-2.