

Original article

A MIDDLE KINGDOM FAMILY FUNERARY STELA AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM (EA571)

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Abstract:

This paper deals with the stela of two couples *s3 hwt-hr* and his wife *hwi* and *s3 imn* and his wife *hwi*. It seems that the same woman married both, it now preserved in the British Museum London. This stela was found in Abydos, and dating to the beginning of the 12th dynasty, it belonged to two couples mentioned above, there are other people were depicted on the stela, including four sons to *s3 hwt-hr*. Three were from his wife *hwt*, and the fourth was from another wife called *Bt*. Additionally, there were depictions of two sons, wives, a friend, and eight servants. This rectangular limestone stela measures 125 cmx51 cm. It preserves, from parallel stelae, hieroglyphic signs, clothing details, and the *htp-di-nsw* formula. It dates back to the early 12th dynasty and reveals its place of discovery. The stela is inscribed in four registers; it was precisely carved, with accurate human figures, decorative elements, hieroglyphs, and detailed offerings above and below the offering tables.

1. Introduction

The stela understudy belongs to two couples *s3 hwt-hr* and his wife *hwi* and *s3 imn* and his wife *hwi*. It seems that the same woman married both. The stela was discovered in Abydos. It is currently displayed at the British Museum [1]. It derives its name from the lady portrayed alongside two different men.

2. Description

This rectangular limestone stela, fig. (1) measures 125 cmx 51 cm. It preserves, from parallel stelae, hieroglyphic signs, clothing details, and the *htp-di-nsw* formula. It dates back to the early 12th dynasty and reveals its place of discovery^(a). The stela is inscribed in four registers as follows:

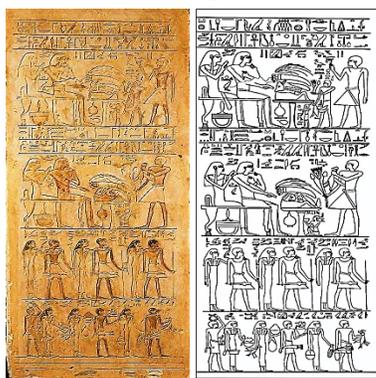


Figure (1) a. (EA571) limestone stela, b. line drawings to the stela of *hwi* (©British Museum), (© Iman Elsaid)

2.1. The 1st register

It is preceded by two writing lines containing the *htp di niswt* formula. Then, there are representations of Steward *s3 hwt-hr*^(b) and his wife *hwi*^(c) sitting before an offering table on a chair with animal-shaped legs and a low back. Underneath the chair is a sizeable Ankh-shaped mirror. *s3 hwt-hr* wears a long shoulder-height formal wig, a short kilt, and is barefoot. He holds a handkerchief in his left hand and extends his right hand towards the offering table. His wife, *hwi*, sits behind him, barefoot, wearing a long wig and tied dress. She has her left hand on her husband's shoulder and raises her right hand in adoration. In front of them, there is a simple table with a high base. There are various items on the table, including meat, thigh of an ox, bread, vegetables, an ox head, onions, a burning incense burner, and a simple oval mirror. On the other side of the table, their son, *s3 mnht*, stands wearing a short wig and triangular short kilt. He raises his right hand in salutation and hangs his left hand by his side. In front of him is a miniature depiction of the overseer of the storehouse, *intf*. He is depicted wearing a short wig a short kilt, and is barefoot. Moreover, he holds a living goose from the neck with his right hand and presents lotus flowers to his parents with his left hand. A small representation of the steward *m-s3:f* is under the offering table with utensils and a box.

2.2. The 2nd register

It is preceded by two writing lines containing the *hṭp di niswt* formula. Then, there are representations of Steward *s3 imn*^(d) and his wife *ḥw*; it is uncertain whether the woman depicted is the same person or someone else with the same name. Their shape and position match the first register. In front of them is a simple offering table with a high base. On its middle lies a thigh of an ox, bread loaf, vegetables, an ox head, and onions, with an incense burner burning underneath. On the other side of the table stands a man called “Her steward *hṭp ib*”. He wears a short wig and a triangular short kilt. He holds lotus flowers in his right hand and a living goose in his left. Before him, under the table, a small man called “his friend *intf*” sits on one leg and raises the other knee. Furthermore, there are notices that he has sagging in the abdomen and chest area. He presents a bowl to *s3 imn* and his wife with his right hand.

2.3. The 3rd register

It depicts three sons, two with their wives and the third with his mother (*s3 ḥwt-ḥr*'s second wife), arranged from right to left: **a)** His son, *imnii*, stands barefoot, wearing a short wig and a triangular short kilt. He holds a tall stick in his left hand and an *hrp* scepter in his right hand. His wife, wearing a tall wig and tight dress, stands barefoot behind him with her left hand on his left shoulder and her right hand dropped to her side. **b)** His son *sn wsrt* and his wife *s3t mnṯw* are in the same form as his brother and his wife. **c)** His son *imn m ḥ3t* and his mother *Bt3 (b m3^c ḏḥwty)* also have the same form.

2.4. The 4th register

It shows six servants standing from left to right. The first one, *šmsw p3w* has short hair, wears a short kilt, and is barefoot; he holds two living birds in his left hand and a banquet of lotus flowers together with a bag in his right hand. Behind him stands a barefoot female servant *Pt ḥdiw smdt* with long hair and a long, tight dress. She carries a small bag in her left hand and a basket in her right hand. The male and female servants wear the same clothes. Next to them stands a male servant called *s3 ḥwt-ḥr* carrying a big vessel full of offerings on his left shoulder. At the same time, he holds a banquet of onions in his right hand. He is followed by a female servant called *s3b ib ḥtp, whq* holds a big covered vessel and a big bag in her left hand and two living birds in her right hand. Next to her is another female servant named *Wrt 3wyt*, holding a vessel containing a slaughtered bird in her left hand. Meanwhile, she has a short stick and a small roll of cloth in her right hand. A male servant named *Rḥty* stands next to her with a large roll tied on his head, which he supports with his left hand and a small roll of cloth in his right hand.

3. Text

3.1. The 1st register

1. 

hṭp di nswt Wsir nb Ddw Ḥnty-imntyw ntr 3 nb 3bdw
An offering given by the king and Osiris the lord of Busiris,
Kheny-Imentiu the great god and lord of Abydos,

2. 

di.f prt-ḥrw ḥ3 m k3w 3pdw s3rw(linen) ḥt nfr w^cb (n) 3nḥt
ntr 3 im n im3ḥw rsi mr nb .f
he gives invocation offerings of thousands of oxs, birds, linen
clothes, and every good purified thing (to) the living great
god there to the owner at the south, the beloved of his lord.

1. 

imy-r-pr s3-ḥ(w)t-ḥr(w) m3^c-ḥrw
Steward: Sa-Hathor, justified.

2. 

ḥmt mryt.f ḥwi
His beloved wife: Khoui

3. 

s3.f mry.f imy-r-pr s3-mnḥt m3^c-ḥrw
Son1: His beloved son: steward Sa-menkhet, justified.

4. 

imy-r st^(e) In-it.f
overseer of the storehouse: Iniutef.

5. 

wb3 m-s3.f^(t)
Butler: Emsaf.

3.2. The 2nd register

1. 

hṭp di nswt Wsir nb Imnt-nfrt ntr 3 nb 3bdw di.f mw ḥnkt
snṯr

An offering given by the king and Osiris lord of the
Beautiful-west, the great god lord of Abydos, who gives:
water, beer, incense,

2. 

mrḥt ḥt nb(t) nfr(t) w^cb(t) 3nḥt ntr im m (tpy-)3bd 
(tpy-)smdt  *W3g ḏḥwt ḏ3t-ntr-r-Pkr n im3ḥ(w)*
perfume, and all good and pure things that the god lives
on in the-beginning-of-the-month-festival, the-beginning-
of-the-half-month-festival, the-Wag-festival and the-Thoth-
festival, the-God's-crossing-to-Pequer, to the revered-one
(Osiris or the deceased),

3.3. The 3rd register

1. 

imy-r-pr s3-Imn m3^c-ḥrw
Steward: Sa-Amon justified.



hmt.f mryt.f hwi
His beloved wife: Khoui.



hnm.s.f mry.f In-it.f
His beloved friend: Iniutef.

or



wb3. shtp-ib^(g)

Her Butler (?): shetepib .

3.4. The 4th register



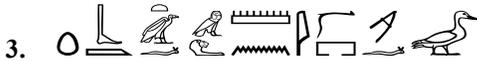
Son 2: *s3.f mry.f Imny hmt.f mryt.f s3t-Wsr*

His beloved son: Ameny, (and) his beloved wife: Sat-
Weser (PN I, 288.4).



Son 3: *s3.f mry.f hm-ntr %-n-Wsrt hmt.f mryt.f s3t-Mntw*

His beloved son: hm-priest Senwesret, (and) his beloved
wife Sat-Monthou.



Son 4: *s3.f mry.f imy-r-pr Imn-m-h3t mwt.f Bt3 (Btw?)*

His beloved son: steward Amenemhat, (and) his mother:
Beta (Betou?).

offering bearers



šmsw P3w

shesmw paw



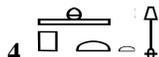
hryt-pr hwi-t-dmt-hr(w)(?) or hqr

Hryt per – khwi dmet Hor



s3-h(w)t-hr(w)

Sa Hathor



wb3t htp

wpat Htep



kt^(h) ddt^(d)

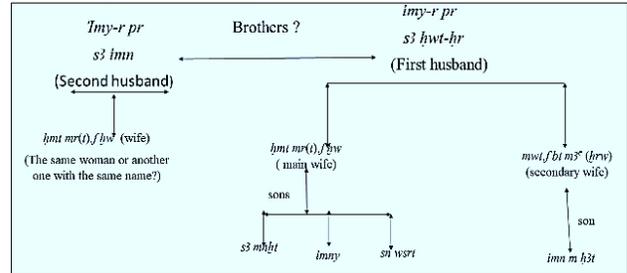
Aqet djdet



Rhty

Rekhty

4. Family Genealogy



5. Result

This stela which was found at Abydos served as a visual representation of the connection between two couples, with the focus being on their unique and intricate relationship, from comparing it with similar stelae, it can be the wife *hw* was perhaps a wife who married two brothers, after having three sons from her first husband, she remarried after him his brother but had no children with him.

6. Discussion

6.1. The relationship between the people represented on the stela:

- Multiple stelae from Abydos were dedicated to different family members from the same period, including stelae dedicated to two brothers [4,5]⁽ⁱ⁾, and another stela [6]^(k) depicting a woman called (*hdrwt*) who was married to two brothers *htpt* and *ihy* [4]. So, it is likely that *s3 hwt-hr* and *s3 imn* were brothers who shared the same tomb and stela.
- The wife Khw was either the wife of Sa Hathor, and they had a number of sons registered on the stela; then, after his death, she married his brother Sa-Amun, and they did not have any sons. Otherwise, she was not the same wife, but they shared a common name, which was typical for the time.
- Another notice on this stela is the arrangement of the persons on it: The first scene is of *s3 hwt hr* and his wife *hw* before their son and the overseer of the storehouse *intf* who was close to the family as evidenced by his whereabouts in the stela. There is a servant, followed by the second scene *s3 imn* and his wife *hw* before a friend of the husband *intf* who is perhaps the same person represented before *s3 hwt-hr* in the first since, and her butler *htp ib* represented bigger than *intf*. We can suggest that her position in the second scene was more important than her husband *s3 imn* and his friend, which supports the idea that she is the same woman, the wife of *s3 hwt-hr*. In the representation of the three sons of *s3 hwt-hr*, two of them with their wives and the third with his mother (the second wife of *s3 hwt-hr*) after the representation of *s3 imn* and *hw* indicated the family relationship between *s3 hwt-hr* and *s3 imn* perhaps as brothers. The people depicted on the stela, and the depiction of the four sons of *s3 hwt-hr* and his second wife made him the main person in the stela and not the wife *hw*.

6.2. Stylistic notes

1. This stela was precisely carved, with accurate human figures, decorative elements, hieroglyphs, and detailed offerings above and below the offering tables.
2. The 2nd scene: *hnms. fmry intf* the representation of the sitting man  differed in artistic style from the rest. The artist followed the ideal style for all the stela, except for the figure of the friend sitting under the second offering table, which was embodied in a realistic style, especially in the chest and abdomen areas with ideal face features. This style belonged to the classical artistic style that spread during the reigns of Amenemhat II and Senusret II, confirming that the stela could be traced back to the late era of Senusret I and the early era of Amenemhat II.

6.3. Religious comments

1. *ddw hnty imnty*: The modern Abusir Bana, located on the left bank of the Damietta Nile branch in the middle of the Delta [7], was called *ddw*, meaning “the pillars”⁽¹⁾, while the full name of the capital was *pr wsir nb ddw* [8]. It was the capital of the 9th Nome of Lower Egypt, where the god Andjety was worshipped before Osiris’.
2. During the early worship of Osiris, he adopted the insignia of the god “*ndty*”^(m) and might have taken the mythical attribute of being a deity as a dead ruler [9]. *3ndty* was depicted as an anthropomorphic deity holding a crook and flail, wearing a crown decorated with two feathers, similar to the Atef crown of Osiris. At the beginning of dynasty IV, King Senefru was carved wearing *ndty* crown, symbolizing rebirth in the afterlife. In the Temple of Seti I in Abydos, the king was depicted burning incense to the god Osiris-*ndty* [10]. Busiris Bana was identified with Duamutef, one of the four sons of Horus, who assisted Anubis in the mummification process. The letters “*dd*” had significance. According to the available texts, the worship of Osiris was carried out at a temple in *ddw*, where the *dd* pillar was upstanding [11].
3. *3bdw* was the name of Abydos in ancient Egypt⁽ⁿ⁾; another early name that might have been attested to Abydos is “*3 wr*” [10]. The city was the capital of Upper Egypt’s 8th Nome and a crucial religious hub for Osiris, who was believed to have been buried there. Abydos was mentioned multiple times in the Pyramid Texts as the gateway to the underworld [12]. Before the appearance of Osiris, the cemetery of Thisis was the burial site for the first dynasty kings and two rulers of the 2nd dynasty [13]. The earliest temple at the site was dedicated to the god Khentimentiu.
4. *hnty imnty*: Khentimentiu^(o) was related to Egypt’s earliest kings in Thisis, whose cemetery was at Umm el Quaab at the western end of Abydos, where many predynastic tombs were discovered. It was through the link to divine kingship that Osiris came to Abydos. In mythology, Osiris, the first king of Egypt, was associated with Khentimentiu, who was later incorporated into the reign of Osiris as Osiris-Khentimentiu. Khentimentiu’s name means “foremost of the Westerners,” eventually becoming an epithet for Osiris, the god of the dead. Osiris adopted many of the god’s iconographic attributes, including the

white crown, crook, flail, and mummified form [14]. At the end of the Old Kingdom, the kings still targeted the temple of Khentimentiu, who was still the pre-eminent local deity. From the Middle Kingdom, the Egyptians sought immortality by identifying Osiris with the dead king, regardless of social background [15]. Since the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, the ancient Egyptians rediscovered the tomb of King Djer in Umm el Qaab from the 1st dynasty. They designated it as the true burial place of Osiris. The tomb was restored, and a new limestone shrine was erected inside with a granodiorite statue of Osiris.

5. *smdt nt hb w3g hwt ntr*: with the birth of the God Thoth, symbolizing rejuvenation and rebirth, this festival was set on the 18th day of the first month of the year. Thoth was worshiped as the god of writing, wisdom, and knowledge. He was also associated with the judgment of the dead by Osiris, which linked the two gods. From the late Old Kingdom, the festival celebrated the birth of Thoth and the rebirth of Osiris. The real role of God “Thoth” in the context of “All” the Stelae of Abydos is as a “Son” of Osiris, who helps his other “son”, named “Sed\Wepwawet” to avenge their father “Osiris”.
6. *Pkr*: It was a region around Abydos, specifically the sanctuary dedicated to the dead god Osiris, which was designated as the sacred territory of Upper Egypt (Thini) [2,3]^(p), maybe it was the name of the main cemetery at Abydos Umm-el-Qaab.

6.4. Paleographical comments

1. **Text I: line 1:**  *hnty imnty ntr 3 nb 3bdw* [16]. The title of *hnty imnty* was written in this formula at the beginning of the 12th dynasty.
2. **Text I: line 1:** the determinative of *hnty imnty* *wcs* written as a sitting god with the white crown  instead of  or .
3. **Text I: line2:** *rh nsw* ^(a) was written in this way in the Old Kingdom and continuing through the beginning of the Middle Kingdom.
4. **Scene I:** In the name *s3 hwt-hr*, the sign *fqr s3 wcs insqr* restly written with the wrong sign , which is closer to the sign  *gb*, instead of  *s3*.
5. **Scene I:** The title of the son *imy-r-pr wcs* written using the wrong sign  instead of the *sqrrest qne* .
6. **2nd Register: 2nd line:**  *wcs* written in unusual writing *thct sqmbined* the two signs from the beginning of the month feast and the middle of the month feast, (*hpy*-)*3bd*  (*hpy*-)*smdt* .
7. **2nd Register: 2nd line:**  *d3t* the determinative of the boat sign was written incorrectly as  instead of .

7. Conclusion

This funerary stela from Abydos, dating to the beginning of the 12th dynasty, belonged to two couples, *s3 hwt-hr* and his wife *hw*, and the second couple *s3 imn* and his wife *hw*. Other people were depicted on the stela, including four sons to *s3 hwt-hr*. Three were from his wife *hw*, and the fourth was from another wife called *Bt3*. Additionally, there were depictions of two sons, wives, a friend, and eight servants. The stela served as a visual representation of the connection between

two couples, with the focus being on their unique and intricate relationship. As discussed in the general commentary No.3, *h_w* was perhaps the wife who married two brothers. After having three sons with her first husband, she remarried his brother but had no children with him.

Endnotes

- a) PM:803-030-194
- b) PN, I, 283,20
- c) PN, I,265,26
- d) PN, I,280,22
- e) Wb 4, 2.17-18; Ward, Titles, no. 313
- f) PN I, 143.9
- g) PN I, 318.1
- h) Ward, 628
- i) PN I, 403.5
- j) PM,V, 60,62 [Abydos, norther cemeteries, offering tables at Cairo Mus. No. 23006, 23014, 23014, 23016 etc. [stela of *s3 inhrt* and his brother *inhrt 3nh*. PM,V,P.62; Peet, The cemeteries of Abydos, Part II, London, 1913,p.85, pl. 13, fig. 2 & 14]
- k) CG 20105.
- l) Wb V, 630/6
- m) LAGG II, 91
- n) Wb I, 9/1
- o) LAGG IV, 39
- p) [Perhaps this word is still used in the Arabic language today, and it is pronounced "Maqar" (مقر) by replacing the letter "M" instead of "B" which means the Residence].
- q) Wb, II, 446. II, 12

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