

Original article

A MIDDLE KINGDOM STELA (CG20470) FROM THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

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Abstract:

The current paper studies the stela of *s3 hpy*; from Abydos, preserved now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo under number (CG20470). Discussions of the meaning of names and title of the owner and his family are accomplished. Furthermore, the paper aims to transcribe, translate and comment on the epigraphic features of *s3 hpy*, who was a sealer, dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty based on artistic style, orthography and paleography.

Keywords:

Middle kingdom

*s3 hpy*

Stela

False door

12<sup>th</sup> dynasty

Deceased

1. Introduction

Abydos is one of the most famous sites in which funerary stela were found. One of these stelae was executed in a similar artistic style in most cases, as it is characterized by being rounded at the top. The owner of the stela, *s3 hpy*. His title is sealer. He mentions all his family's members in the stela. It is now exhibited in the Egyptian museum [1]. The accession numbers: (CG20470=SR3/10155). Which refers to northern necropolis of Abydos. Lange and Schäfer transcribed the hieroglyphs of this stela, but they didn't translate the texts, describe the scenes, nor investigate style or inscription.

- **Owner of the stela:** *s3 hpy*
- **Date:** Middle kingdom, 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, reign of Senusret III?
- **Material:** Limestone.
- **Location:** Abydos.
- **Dimensions:** Width: 43 cm, Height-length: 50 cm.
- **The General Description:** It is a rounded-top stela; its inscription is in sunken relief, while its depictions are in raised relief. Its preservation is good. The front surface was carefully cut and smoothed. The back of the stela was left rough, suggesting that it was meant to be placed in a niche. The stela has three partitions: the first is a text which includes an abbreviated offering list, *hṯp-di-nsw ꜥnd pr-hrw* formulae, while the second partition is a double scene and a central offering table. The last partition has some names

of the owner's family put in a table on the right and left of a central false door depiction; its lentil has the eye *wꜥꜥt* decoration.

2. Methodological Study

2.1. The stela scenes

2.1.1. The first scene

It has the middle partition of the stela. Its central part shows an offering table including ten vertical loaves of bread which have incurved sides. This table is loaded with carefully chosen offerings arranged from top to bottom as follows: green onion, lettuce, cucumber (?), some kinds of bread and an ox foreleg. Under the offering table there is a *ḥs* vase surrounded by the lotus stems, fig. (1). On the left side of the table the owner's stela is depicted seated on a lion-legged chair with a short back. He faces right, towards the offering table; he wears a short wig, leaving the ear uncovered, with a simple broad necklace and a tight knee-length kilt. His right hand is extending towards the offering table, while his left hand is holding a handkerchief. On the same chair, facing right too, there is a figure of a woman, who is called *snṯ.f* "his sister" on the same scale, seated beside him. She extends two hands affectionately grasping the shoulder of *s3 hpy* (the stela owner). She wears a long wig and a full length, close-fitting dress suspended by one shoulder strap and a broad collar. Under her chair

there is a mirror. On the right side of the table, the father of the owner's stela is depicted, seated on a lion-legged chair with a short back. He faces right, towards the same offering table; he wears a long wig, leaving the ear uncovered, with a simple broad necklace and a tight knee-length kilt. His right hand is extending towards the offering table, while his left hand is holding a handkerchief. On the same chair, facing right too, there is a figure of his wife on the same scale, sitting beside him, and she extended two hands affectionately grasping the shoulder of her husband. She wears a long wig and a full length, close-fitting dress suspended by one shoulder strap and a broad collar. Under her chair there is a *mrht* vase.

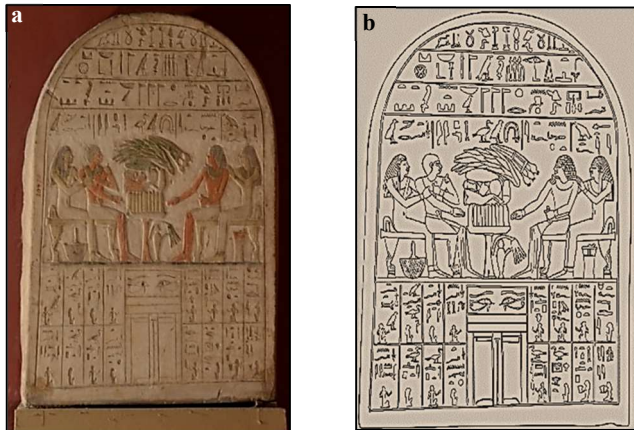


Figure (1) a. stela of *ss hp.y* (by Abdelrahman. S.), b. line drawing of *ss hp.y* stela (by Elsayed, W.)

### 2.1.2. The second scene

It has the central part of the third partition of the stela; it depicts a false door [2], its lentil is decorated with wedjat eye [3]. This door reflects, symbolically, the deceased person's wish to pass through when entering and exiting the tomb [2], as an entrance of the soul [3], to benefit from the prayers which are recited over it by the priests, in addition to having offerings presented to him in front of it, as well as seeing visitors to the tomb, and communicating with the world of the living. So, it connects the living with the soul of the deceased in the afterlife. This connection is asserted by wedjat eye depiction which enables the deceased to look out of the chamber and see all the visitors who enter the tomb and the offerings presented to him [5]. In addition, the ancient Egyptians considered it a means of protection and warding off evil [3].

## 2.2. The stela texts

### 2.2.1. The first text

It runs, in the first partition, horizontally in three lines. The 1<sup>st</sup> one is divided into two semi-identical texts. The right one runs right to left, while the left one runs left to right as follows:

←	→
<i>h3 k3w 3pdw šs mnht dfw</i>	<i>h3 t hnkt k3w 3pdw šs mnht hpt</i>
<i>One thousand of oxen, fowls, alabaster and food<sup>(a)</sup></i>	<i>One thousand of bread, beer, oxen, fowls, alabaster, clothes and offering<sup>(a)</sup></i>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines start from right to left as follows:



<sup>(b)</sup>*hpt di(.w) nsw Wsir hnty-imntyw ntr ʿ3 nb 3bdw* |<sup>3</sup>*di.f prt-hrw t hnkt k3w 3pdw n im3hw hr ntrw nbw smyt imntt*

|<sup>2</sup>*An offering that the king gives (i.e., a royal offering to)<sup>(b)</sup> Osiris, foremost of the westerners, the great god, lord of Abydos. |<sup>3</sup>May he<sup>(c)</sup> give an invocation offering of bread and beer, oxen and fowls<sup>(h)</sup> for the venerated before the gods, lords<sup>(d)</sup> of the western necropolis<sup>(i)</sup>.*

### 2.2.2. The second text

It is a horizontal line divided into four partitions by three strokes. The two right partitions, which refer to the owner of the stela and his sister, run right to left, while the others, which refer to his father and his mother, run left to right as follows:

 <i>sn.t f mrw</i> [4]	 <i>htm w s3</i>	 <i>it.f Nht</i>	 <i>mwt.f hty</i>
<i>His sister mrw</i>	<i>The sealer s3 hp.y</i>	<i>His father nht</i>	<i>His mother hty</i>

### 2.2.3. The last text

A left and right table has names of the family owner written vertically in two rows; each row has four vertical rectangular partitions. The signs of the right one run right to left, while those of the left run left to right as follows:

(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
				False door depiction			
(8)	(7)	(6)	(5)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)

### 2.2.4. Names of the right-hand table:

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>sn.f shtp</i> <i>ib</i> [4]	<i>sn.f pth m</i> <i>šm.f</i> <sup>(e)</sup>	<i>sn.f nht</i>	<i>hmt.f šdi</i> [4] <sup>(f)</sup>
<i>His brother shtp ib</i>	<i>(2) His brother pth m šm. F</i>	<i>(3) His brother nht</i>	<i>(4) His wife šdi</i>
(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>s3.f imny</i> [4]	<i>s3t ht-hr</i> <i>hnt</i> [4]	<i>h3t h3pt</i> <sup>(g)</sup>	<i>W3mt iy</i> <sup>(h)</sup>
<i>his brot- her Imny</i>	<i>(his) daugh- ter ht-hr hnt</i>	<i>h3t h3pt</i>	<i>W3mt iy</i>

### 2.2.5. Names of the left-hand table

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>sn.f w3h</i>	<i>snt.f hty</i>	<i>mwt.f s3t.wsrt</i>	<i>ʿIt.f nfr-tm̄w</i>
[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
His brother <i>w3h</i>	His sister <i>hty</i>	His mother <i>s3t wsrt</i> <sup>(1)</sup>	His father <i>nfr-tm̄w</i> <sup>(2)</sup>
(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>snt.f nht</i>	<i>s3 sh̄tp</i>	<i>s3t sh̄tp(t)</i>	<i>sn.f imny</i>
His sister <i>nht</i>	The son <i>sh̄tp</i>	The daughter <i>sh̄tp(t)</i>	His brother <i>imny</i>

### 2.3. Dating

The stela gives us strong evidence for dating it by the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, as follows: **1)** The first appearance of the phrase *htpt df3w* was at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, the reign of king Amenemhat I, and that its use became widespread in the late new kingdom period and the era of the second intermediate period [5]. **2)** The arrangement of 𓂏𓂐𓂑 with the 𓂒 sign centered above the 𓂓 *htp* sign after the 𓂔 *nsw* sign was common in the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty [6]. **3)** Omitting the god determinative 𓂕 from Osiris name [7] became common during the reign of king "Amenemhat III" and continued until the era of the next dynasty [8]. **4)** The epithet *hntyw imntyw* [9], "in front of people in the west (the dead)" was one of the distinctive titles of the god Osiris during the reign of king Senusret I until the reign of king Senusret III, where all titles of Osiris were neglected except it [8]. This title usually had the determinative denoting the god 𓂕 during the Middle Kingdom until the beginning of the reign of king Senusret III, when his determinative, as the instance here, had been neglected since then. **5)** During the early period of the 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, we find, as it is the case in the instance discussed here, a mixture of *htp-di-nsw ʿnd prt-hrw* formulae [10]. **6)** The title *nb smyt imntt* "Lord of the western desert" dates back to the middle kingdom [11]. **7)** Tomich believes that the eye of the faces was depicted on the stela of individuals since the reign of king Senusret III [12].

### 3. Results

- (1) This study shows that this stela was found in Abydos, Sohag, upper Egypt.
- (2) The stela is dating back to 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, reign of Senusret III.
- (3) The owner of the stela holds a title "*htmw*" which means "the sealer."

### 4. Discussion

#### 4.1. Stylistic notes on the person and the offering table

**a)** The relief of the stela is generally well-incised, showing details in its all elements, where details appear of the deceased and his family regarding the features of the face, head, a tight knee-length kilt of the man and his father, the long dress of the woman, and the jewelry of both. **b)** Although stela of 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty varied greatly in quality, style, and

method of production, they all displayed the simplicity of the offering table scene commonly found on stela of the Middle kingdom.

#### 4.2. Palaeographical and philological comments

**a)** *htpt df3w*: this phrase means "food offerings". It is noticeable that the writer didn't link these two words together, but he separated them, putting each of them as an end word at both end of the first line. It is believed that there is a direct addition relationship between the two words and not, as some consider it, conjunction, "offerings and food." So, its being written in this way asserts the offering continuity. **b)** *htp di nsw wsir*: The writer followed Gardiner's approach considering this phrase as a relative clause, in addition to considering the king, not the god, as the donor [13]. The reason is that the god is not mentioned before the king. This supports the probability that it was a royal gift not a joint gift between the god and the king. This royal offering will be given to the deceased by the mentioned god. The purpose clause: *di.f* "may he donate" gives a privilege for this understanding. **c)** Some consider the god as a giver not a recipient, because of the dative's absence, i.e. "n+a god name"="for the god N" [14]. They support the standpoint that there is a "co-ordination" between the king and the god, so they gave the translation: "the gift offered by the king and the god" [15]. **d)** *di.f pr-hrw* "may he give": The context of this purpose clause proves that there is no co-ordination between the king and the god, i.e. there is only one donator who is the king who is referred to by the suffixes pronoun *.f* **e)** *nbw smyt imntt*: the word *nbw* can be treated as a noun which means "lords" as the initial part of the epithet "lords of the western necropolis; furthermore, it can be considered as an adjective for the previous noun *ntrw*, so we can read *ntrw nbw* "all the gods". The writer believes that this way of writing 𓂏 was widely intended. **f)** The sign which is read *sh̄m*, in this name, isn't clear obviously. The writer believes that it is closer to the sign 𓂏 which occasionally phon. *sh̄m* because of 𓂏 *sh̄m*, a kind of sistrum [13]. **g)** This wife wasn't depicted beside her husband on the left hand scene, the only one who was depicted was called *snt.f mrw* "his sister *Mrw*", so we have here two suggestions: the first is that the represented woman was a preferable beloved sister, and the second is that she is another wife who took this title as a honorific one. **h)** The first sign of this name is closer to the sign 𓂏; this understanding is proved by its determinative 𓂏 which is one of the wide determinatives of the word *hdt* "the white bread". In fact, the name of this personality reflexes a common wish for having abundant of supplies, because it is translated literally "white bread and offerings", this translation can be supported by the ending determinative 𓂏. **i)** The first singe is vague, but the writer suggests the sign 𓂏, because it is accompanied by the determinative 𓂏 which is a characteristic feature for this word in its meaning "repetition" [16]. In addition, the final determinative 𓂏 supports the suggested reading. This name, as it is previous, embodied a wish for having more offerings, because it has the meaning: "repetitions (of offerings) are coming". **j)** The stela mentioned two mothers and two fathers

for its owner. One of these two names of his mother and his father is mentioned during the names of the hand left table (no. 4, 5) which are: *mwt.f s3t wsrt(t)* “his mother *s3t wsrt*”, and *it.f Nfr-tmw* “his father *Nfr-tmw*”, while the two others are mentioned above the male and female seated figures on the right had scene, which are: *mwt.f hty* “his mothe *hty*”, and *it.f Nht* “his father *Nht*”. This double parental relationship can’t be conceived without considering a pair of those titles as honorific titles.

## 5. Conclusion

*The stela is a perfect example for the Middle Kingdom stela. It has abundant linguistic evidence which pushed the writer to put it inside this period. Its sculptor shouted a cry against death, and on the other side, revealed his linguistic and artistic skills to assert the renewability of the deceased using chosen formulae, and expressed positive wishes for the afterlife as pictographic symbols indicate resurrection and life.*

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