

The Stela of Nefer-Hotep (CG 20192- JE 25547)

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Abstract:

This article is a publication of a limestone stela of unknown provenance that was once preserved in the Egyptian museum at Al Tahrir square - Cairo (CG 20192- JE 25547). It is transferred later on to the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM. No. 14252).

It is a round-topped funerary stela and it belongs to a man called *Nfr-hotp*. The upper part of the stela is adorned with a representation of the jackal god Anubis crouching upon his shrine and his title is written in front of him. Then three lines of inscriptions are depicted representing the offering formula for the deceased. The lower part of the stela is divided into two parts. On the left side a figure of *Nfr-hotp* is shown, while the right side presents three columns of inscriptions depicting the names of the deceased and members of his family. The article tries to explore the identity of its owner and to know the date of the stela through its epigraphy and iconography. The article discusses also the title of "*smsw h3y.t*" held by the deceased and its function. Furthermore, the stela shows an early representation of the retrograde writing.

Key words: Stela of *Nfr-hotp* - The title of "*smsw h3y.t*" - Stela from the 13th Dynasty - (*sbk-iry*) - (*s3t n=i*)- (*nbw-htp*) - (CG 20192- JE 25547) - Retrograde writing.

Introduction:

The subject of this article is a limestone stela of unknown provenance that is preserved now at the Grand Egyptian Museum. The article aims to explore the identity of its owner as well as the date of the monument through its epigraphy and iconography. Furthermore, it discusses the origin and the function of the title "*smsw h3y.t*" held by the owner of the stela. The stela presents also an early appearance of a retrograde text.

The Stela of *Nfr-hotp*: (Fig. 2 and Pl.1)

The stela forming the subject of this article was once preserved in the Egyptian Museum at Al-Tahrir Square- Cairo (CG 20192- JE 25547, Sr. 3-9426). It was transferred afterward to the Grand Egyptian Museum, where it carried a new inventory (GEM No. 14252). Its province is unknown. The overall decoration and text dates it back to the Late Middle Kingdom or the 13th Dynasty.

Description:

It is a round-topped funerary limestone stela in a well state of preservation. It measures about 26 cm in height and 17.6 cm in width. Its surface is incised by a scene and a text. There is a sign of burn mark in the middle part of its lunette. The surface of the artifact is divided into four parts (Fig.1):

A. The lunette which is decorated with a figure of the jackal-god Anubis, crouching upon his shrine. In front of him, the text reads



(←) *tp.y dwz f* "He who is upon his mountain".

B. The middle part bears three lines of incised hieroglyphic text. It reads (←):

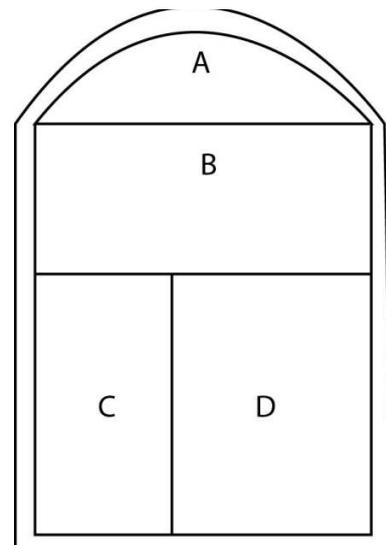


Fig. 1: The different parts of the stela

Translation:

"(1) A boon which the king gives (to) Anubis, he who is upon his mountain, (so that) he may give an invocation-offerings of bread (2) beer, oxen, fowls, alabaster, clothing, incense, ointment (and) all (3) good and pure things on which a god lives, for the *Ka* of".

The lower section of the stela is divided into two parts "C and D" (Fig. 1). The first part on the left side (C) shows the deceased standing (facing the right) with the left leg-stepped forward and with his arms hung down beside his body. He is depicted with a short hair, a collar around his neck and an outstretched knee-skirt, which is tied around his waist. The second part (D), (the right) bears three columns of hieroglyphs. They read as (↓):

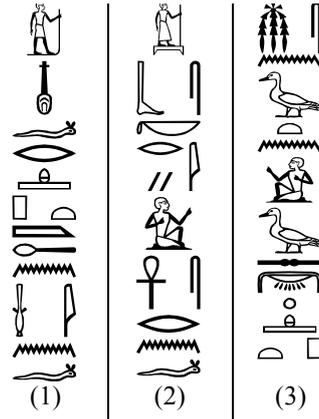
The Stela of Nefer-Hotep (CG 20192- JE 25547)

Transliteration:

- 1) *smsw h3yt nfr-htp m3c-hrw in sn =f*
- 2) *smw h3yt sbk-jry s'nh rn=f*
- 3) *ms n s3.t n=i s3=s nbw-htp*

Translation:

- (1) Elder of the portal, *Nefer-Hotep*, true of voice, by his brother
- (2) Elder of the portal, who causes his name to live *Sobek-iry*
- (3) Born of *Sat-en-i*, her son *Nebow-Hotep*.



Paleographical Notes:

- (a) (*Lines 1,2*): Despite the mention of the word *hnkt* in the regular formula of $\overline{\text{prt-hrw t hnkt}}$, at the end of (*line 1*), the scribe put similar sign, namely $\overline{\text{hnkt}}$ (at the beginning of *line 2*).
- (b) (*Columns. 1, 2*): It is to be noted that the text of these two columns were inscribed to be read from right to left (\leftarrow). However, they should be read from the other direction (\rightarrow), so the title and the name of the deceased *Nfr-htp* would be read after the phrase *n-k3-n* "for the *Ka* of" at the end of *line 3*. This way of writing is called (Retrograde writing). ² *col. 3*: The signs of this column were transcribed from left to right (\rightarrow), however the sign $\overline{\text{hnkt}}$ is mistakenly written to face the right direction.
- (c) It should be mentioned that the text on the stela shows the existence of some hieratic signs as in the way of representing the letter $\overline{\text{hnkt}}$ n.³

General Commentary:

I. The Style and the Dating of the Stela:

A combination of features may strongly date this stela back to the 13th Dynasty. The scenes on the stela are hardly achieved. The figure of its owner is ill-proportioned and lacks modeling. It is shown with the large size of his ears and the ill-proportioned shoulders, hands and feet. The poor quality of inscriptions and scenes indicate the decline of workmanship, at the end of the Middle Kingdom and during the 13th Dynasty.⁴ However other evidences are supporting this date, such as:

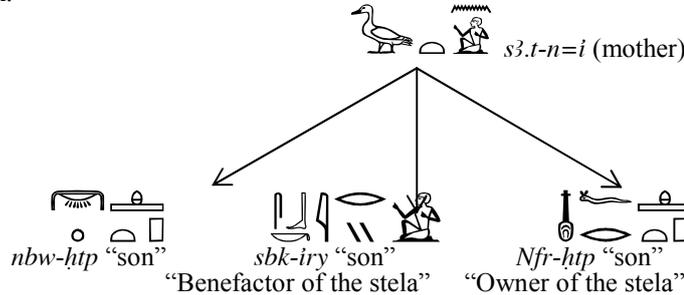
- The representation of the jackal god *Anubis* on the lunette of the stela is one of the characteristic features of funerary stelae from the late 12th dynasty.⁵ This representation is regarded as a protective symbol for the deceased. The name in front of the jackal figure could refer to *Anubis*⁶ or some times to *Wepwawat*.⁷ Some stelae show a representation of two jackals facing each other in a crouching pose upon shrines, but with no inscription accompanying them.⁸ Other stelae described one of the jackals as *Anubis*, while the other jackal represents *Wepwawat*.⁹
- The way of depicting the offering formula is considered as a strong evidence of dating the stela back to the 13th Dynasty. In the way of writing the $\overline{\text{htp-di-nsw}}$ formula, the sign $\overline{\text{di}}$ comes at the end of the composition. This feature is a prominent character of the horizontal inscription of this formula on stelae from the 11th to the 13th Dynasties.¹⁰ It is mentioned above that stelae of the 13th Dynasty attested a poor quality of workmanship, on the contrary, stelae from the 11th to the 12th Dynasties, show development of quality of their scenes and texts.¹¹ From the 14th Dynasty to the 17th Dynasty the previous way of depicting the offering formula is replaced by $\overline{\text{htp-di-nsw}}$, where the sign $\overline{\text{di}}$ comes at the second position of the composition.¹² So this evidence may likely date the stela back to the 13th Dynasty.
- The depiction of the phrase $\overline{\text{di=f}}$ "he gives" after the *htp-di-nsw* formula and before the mention of $\overline{\text{prt-hrw}}$ "invocation-offerings" is one of the features of the late 12th Dynasty stelae.¹³
- The term $\overline{\text{mnht}}$ represents the two words $\overline{\text{ss}}$ "alabaster" and $\overline{\text{mnht}}$ "clothing" combined together in one sign. The first attestation of this composition was under *Senusert III*¹⁴ and prevailed henceforth.¹⁵ However it did not entirely replace the occurrence of the two separate signs.¹⁶
- The phrase $\overline{\text{ht nbt nfrt w'bt}}$ "all things good and pure" made its first attestation under the reign of *Amenemhat I*.¹⁷ It became common afterwards in the offering formulae of stelae from the Late Middle Kingdom.¹⁸ Several stelae, which are dated back to the late 12th Dynasty and the 13th Dynasty, inscribed exactly in the same way of writing the offering formulae and the invocation-offerings followed by the phrase of $\overline{\text{ht nbt nfrt w'bt}}$.¹⁹
- The designation of the recipient of the funerary offerings on the stela is $\overline{\text{n k3 n}}$ "for the *Ka* of". This designation, which preceded the name of the deceased on the stela, prevailed from the second part of the 12th Dynasty.²⁰ Before that time the name of the owner of the stela was preceded by the honoring title of $\overline{\text{im3hy}}$ ²¹ and during the reign of *Amenemhat II* the designation of $\overline{\text{n k3}}$ was added to the previous title of $\overline{\text{im3hy}}$ and it became $\overline{\text{n k3 im3hy}}$ (followed by the name of the deceased).²²

- The name of  *Nfr-htp* “Beautiful (and) satisfied” prevailed during the Late Middle Kingdom.²³ This name is found twenty five times in the Theban sources during the Late Middle Kingdom²⁴, several attestations from centers of Upper Egypt²⁵ and only a few times from Memphis and lower Egypt.²⁶ Ilin-Tomich points out to the historical importance of this name during the Late Middle Kingdom and the 13th Dynasty in Thebes. It was the name of one of the important kings of this period²⁷. A list of the monuments, which carry this name, is mentioned in his study on the production of memorial stelae during the middle kingdom.²⁸ He mentioned that most of the artifacts from the Late Middle Kingdom and the 13th Dynasty, whose owner is called *Nfr-htp* would be mostly from the Theban area or generally from Upper Egypt.
- The name of  “*sbk-jry*”, according to H. Ranke, could be read also as “*iry-sbk*”; it prevailed during the Middle Kingdom.²⁹ He dedicated this stela to his brother *Nfr-htp*.
- The expression  *s'nh rn=f* “which causes his name to live” prevailed during the early Second Intermediate Period.³⁰ This vivification formula consists of personal name + *s'nh rn* = “the suffix pronoun”. It is usually preceded by the particle *in* “by” and the relationship between the beneficial and the owner of the stela. On this stela *sbk-iry* is the benefactor of the stela to his brother *Nfr-htp*. The vivification formula is frequently found on stelae placed on sanctuaries or funerary chapels so that the owner of the stela could participate in the rituals and prayers, practiced in this sacred palace.³¹
- The filiation  *ms.n* followed by the name of the mother is commonly used in the early Middle Kingdom until the late reign of king Senusret I³² and it reappeared again from the 13th Dynasty.³³
- According to H. Ranke, the name of  *s3.t-n=i* “Daughter of me” appeared during the Middle Kingdom,³⁴ but it seems that the first and the last appearance of this name is found on this stela. No other example for this name can be identified.
- The name  *nbw-htp* “Gold is satisfied” has been known in Egypt since the Old Kingdom and it is still in use during the Middle Kingdom. H. Ranke pointed out that the word *nbw* “gold” may allude to the goddess Hathor.³⁵ During the Old Kingdom this name was given only to females.³⁶ From the Middle Kingdom the name was given to both genders.³⁷

Due to the absence of the stela from any documented excavation and depending on the characteristics of its epigraphic and iconographic style M. Marée related the stela to a well-known workshop in Abydos. The products of this workshop have common features represented in the relative width of horizontal signs, the highly distinguishing *k3* sign, human figures are shown with sharp lines and ill-proportioned torso and shoulders. This workshop is dated back to the 13th Dynasty.³⁸ A stela of similar style and design is preserved at Petrie Museum in London (UC. 14452). It belongs to the lady of the house Iuhetibu and it is dated back to the Late Middle Kingdom.³⁹

II. Genealogy:

From the text on the stela, a possible genealogy of the family of *Nfr-htp* can be described in the following illustration.

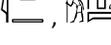
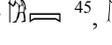
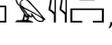
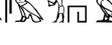


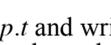
The name of the father of *Nfr-htp* was not mentioned on the stela, despite the enough space on its surface to add another fourth column. Probably the artist either overestimated the space, needed to carve the figure of the deceased or he depicted the name of *Nfr-htp* on the wrong column. He could not add another fourth column to the text to allow the name of *Nfr-htp* to be read directly after the phrase *n k3 n* “for the *Ka* of” at the end of line.3.

It should be mentioned that a limestone funerary stela was found in the sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine Island, which belongs to a deceased called *Nfr-htp*. He held also the title of *smsw h3y.t*. The stela is dated back to the 13th Dynasty. It was used as a block in the upper windowsill of a Nubian house. The stela shows a sign of burn mark on its middle part, due to the smoke of candles, which were placed on the lower windowsill. The genealogy of the deceased is depicted on the stela in a similar style and feature of the stela which is the subject of this article. Mentioned only the names of his wife (*s3.t-Hwt-Hr*) and his mother (*nbw-hr=tn*), which differ from the name of the mother in the present stela (*s3.t-n=i*). In other words the owners of these two stelae are different persons.⁴⁰

III. The Title of *smsw h3y.t*:

The title of  *smsw h3y.t*⁴¹ is mentioned twice on the stela of *Nfr-htp*. The owner of the stela and his brother held this title. *smsw h3y.t* which is an administrative title that could be held by an officer in a royal palace or a temple.⁴²

The title consists of two words. The first word is , var. ⁴³ *smsw* “eldest”. The second word is ⁴⁴ *h3y.t* “hall”, “forecourt”, “vestibule or a portico of a temple” or “judicial court”. The title can be written as, ,  or ⁴⁵,  or ⁴⁶ *smsw h3y.t*. During the 13th Dynasty

the figure of the man is placed upon the sign  *p.t* and written as . The sign  could replace the sign ⁴⁷, as it is depicted at the beginning of *Column.1* on the stela of *Nfr-htp*. This way of writing the title is one of the reasons for dating the stela back to the 13th Dynasty.

The Stela of Nefer-Hotep (CG 20192- JE 25547)

The title of *smsw h3yt* is variously translated. A. Erman and H. Grapow interpret it as “The Elder of the Hall”.⁴⁸ D. Jones translates the title as “Elder of the (judicial) Court”.⁴⁹ A. Gardiner refers to it as “Elder of the Portal”.⁵⁰ This title became very frequent during the late Middle Kingdom, especially in the Theban and the Upper Egyptian administration.⁵¹ Papyrus Boulaq 18⁵² mentions the titles of local Theban and residential officials who received the daily provisions.⁵³ Among these titles is the title of *smsw h3yt*. It is referred to this title at different ranks.⁵⁴ The Abydian stela of the general (*nsw-mntw*) mentions the highest rank of this title. The owner of the stela carries the title of *tpy smsw h3yt* “The High Elders of the Portal” among other important administrative titles.⁵⁵ This proves that the holder of this title was among the important and the close courtiers of the king.⁵⁶

A. Ilin-Tomich points out to this title among other two titles that prevailed in the Theban administration during the Late Middle Kingdom. These titles are *wr mdw smꜥw* “Chef of Tens of Upper Egypt” and *s3bꜥ r3-nḥn* “Juridical, mouth of Hierakonpolis”.⁵⁸ These three titles played a very important role during the 13th Dynasty and their importance extended to the 17th Dynasty. They are regarded as the high titles of the royal courtiers.⁵⁹ These titles together with the title of *rh nswt* “One acquainted by the king” belong to people of the same hierarchy.⁶⁰ They were held by administrative officials of the royal palace. In a study about the Theban administration during the Late Middle Kingdom, A. Ilin-Tomich refers to these titles as a diachronic evidence to date the texts back to the 13th Dynasty and originates them from Thebes.⁶¹

The Function of the Title:

The title is connected with the outer royal palace or temple; however, its domain is ambiguous. S. Quirke assumed that the owners of this title are officials in the palace upon which the palace can draw for commissions.⁶² N. G. Davies interpreted the title as a leader or a guide in the palace or the temple. He depends in his interpretation on a text from the tomb of Rekhmire at Thebes. It depicts “I reached the door of the palace-gate; the courtiers bent their backs. Having found the elders of the forecourt clearing the way for me”.⁶³ This text refers to the connection between the holders of this title and the outer palace or temple. It points out to the possibility of that *smsw h3yt* is the person, who receives the visitors or the delegations and show them their way inside the temple or the palace.⁶⁴ W. C. Hayes considered the title of *smsw h3yt* as an honorary title that was given to officials as a sign of gratitude to their service in other posts, among of which is the post of a door-keeper.⁶⁵

F. El Elimi and A. Enany concluded that the domain of the holders of this title exceeds the post of a door-keeper. They depended in their opinion on the wide range of titles that were given to the *smsw h3yt* during the Old Kingdom, such as; *hr s3t3* “the Master of Secrets”, *shd wꜥbw* “Inspector of purifiers”, *wb*-priest and *sd3wty bity* “the chancellor of the king of Lower Egypt”. The authors believed that the holder of this title has an administrative duty in the place of their work.⁶⁶

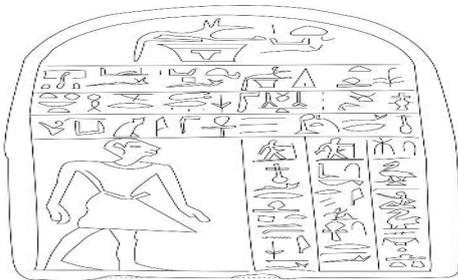
This opinion is quite right, especially when other titles with more administrative nature prevailed together with the title of “*smsw h3yt*” during the Late Middle Kingdom. For example: *wr mdw smꜥw* “Chief of the Tens of Upper Egypt”, *smsw* “Follower”, *sb3 r3-nḥn* or *r3-nḥn* “Dignitary, mouth of Hierakonpolis”, *ꜥḥ n niwt* “Officer of the City”, *s3 n ḥnrt wr* “Scribe of the Great Enclosure”, *imy-ḥt s3-prw ꜥr imy* or *s3-prw* “Security Official State Guard”, *imy-r3 pr* “Estate Overseer” and *whmw* “Reporter”.⁶⁷ These titles are administrative titles and connected with the courtiers of the royal palace, indicating a development in the use of the title of *smsw h3yt* to be an administrative title and not related to the post of a door-keeper of a palace or a temple.

Conclusion:

The stela of *Nfr-ḥtp* (CG 20192- JE 25547) is a funerary stela that belongs to one of the courtiers of the 13th Dynasty. The features of the stela indicate that it is originated from a workshop at Abydos, depending on the way of carving its inscription and scene; however, the stela itself was probably found in a chapel or a sanctuary, most probably in Thebes, to let the deceased participate in the prayers or the religious rituals, practiced there.

Nfr-ḥtp and his brother *sbk-iry*, who is the benefactor of the stela, both carried the title of *smsw h3yt* “Elder of the Portal”. This title indicates their important status in the administration of that time as they were among the courtiers of the king. The stela mentions the name of their mother *s3t n=i* and their third brother *nbw-ḥtp*, while the name of their father is not mentioned.

This stela presents an early example of a retrograde text, which prevailed later on in writing the religious texts of the New Kingdom. This stela proves that the first appearance of this way of writing is not dated back to the 18th Dynasty, but it is dated back much earlier to the 13th Dynasty.



(Fig. 2)

A Facsimile of the stela of *Nfr-ḥtp* (CG 20192- JE 25547)



(Pl. 1)

Stela of *Nfr-ḥtp* (CG 20192- JE 25547)⁶⁸

Bibliography Abbreviations:

- BAR*: British Archaeological Reports, London.
- EJARS*: Egyptian Journal of Archaeological and Restoration Studies, Sohag.
- JEA*: Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, London.
- RdE*: Revue d'égyptologie, Paris.
- ZÄS*: Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde, Berlin.
- ZDMG*: Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Wiesbaden

لوحة نفر- حتب (CG 20192- JE 25547)

دينا صادق سيد العربي

تمثل هذه المقالة دراسة للوحة غير منشورة من الحجر الجيري تحمل رقم (CG 20192 -JE 25547). هذه اللوحة كانت محفوظة بالمتحف المصري بالتحرير ثم تم نقلها للمتحف المصري الكبير بالجيزة وحملت رقم (GEM.14252). واللوحة غير معروف مكان اكتشافها.

واللوحة موضوع البحث هي لوحة جنازية ذات قمة مستديرها تخص المدعو: نفر حتب. يزين قمة اللوحة منظر للمعبود أنوبيس جالساً فوق مقصورته وأمامه لقبه. ثم يتبع ذلك ثلاثة أسطر أفقية تسجل نص القرايين الخاص بصاحب اللوحة. أما الجزء السفلي من اللوحة فينقسم إلى منظر صاحب اللوحة على اليسار وأمامه على اليمين ثلاثة أعمدة بكتابات تسجل اسمه وأسماء بعض من أفراد أسرته وألقابهم. والذي حمله كل من صاحب اللوحة وأخيه **smsw hAyt** وتناقش المقالة أهمية وتطور اللقب وتتناول المقالة كذلك محاولة تأريخ اللوحة بناء على عدة عناصر موجودة بها سواء من طريقة كتابة العلامات في النصوص أو المناظر الممثلة على اللوحة. كما توضح اللوحة بداية ظهور أسلوب كتابة (Retrograde) وتنتهي المقالة بخاتمة توضح أهم نتائج البحث.

الكلمات الدالة: لوحة (نفر- حتب) - لقب **smsw hAyt** - لوحة من عصر الأسرة الثالثة عشرة - سوبك- إرى - نيو-حتب - سات-إن-إى - أسلوب كتابة (Retrograde)

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- ⁴⁴ This word is written as , var.  h.t during the Old Kingdom, then it is written as  var. .
- During the Middle Kingdom and the 18th Dynasty an abbreviated form of the word appeared as  hy.t. The same word has referred also to the roof of a temple or a building since the Middle Kingdom and it has referred to "heaven" since the end of the New Kingdom, cf; *Wb.*, II, 476.
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