

The Stela of Merer

(National Museum in Cracow)

This limestone stela from the First Intermediate Period has been extensively studied. Following the first translation and commentaries by Černý,¹ various other studies have been made by Shenkel,² Fisher³ and Gilula and Groll.⁴ Lichtheim⁵ included an excellent translation in her monograph and, more recently, an additional commentary on the difficult passages has been published by Jansen-Winkel.⁶



ḥtp-dī-(n)swt⁷ inpw tp(i) ḏw.f imi wt nb ḏsr m swt.f nb nfrt w^cbt prt-ḥrw t ḥnḳt



n im3ḥw⁸ smr-w3t(i) wdpw (i)m(i)-r sftw nw⁹ pr ḥww mi ḳd.f mrr ḏd

A royal offering of Anubis, who is upon his mountain, and in the place of embalming, lord of the Sacred Land,¹⁰ in all his beautiful and pure places, (giving) an invocation offering of bread and beer for the worthy of attention/honored one, sole companion (of the king), butler and overseer of the butchers of the entire house of Kuu (the nome of Edfu¹¹), Merer, saying:



ink w^cb r sft drp m ḥwt-ntr 2 ḥr-tp¹² ḥḳ3



iw drp.n(.i) <n>^a ḥḳ3 13^b n(i) zp^c iw(y)t ḥt im(.i)

¹ J. Černý, JEA, 47 (1961), pp. 5-9.

² W. Shenkel, Memphis, Herakleopolis, Theben, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen, 12, Wiesbaden (1965), pp. 62-64.

³ H.G. Fisher, Kush, 10 (1962), pp. 333-334.

⁴ M. Gilula and S. I. Groll, RdE 20 (1968), pp. 55-56.

⁵ M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, Vol. I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 87-88.

⁶ K. Jansen-Winkel, JEA, 74 (1988), pp. 204-207.

⁷ Allen (25.10).

⁸ Allen, Essay 21.

⁹ Old Egyptian writing of the plural genitival adjective; see E. Edel, Altägyptische Grammatik, Vol. I.

¹⁰ The cemetery at Abydos.

¹¹ The house of Khuu has also been mentioned in other texts, e.g. in the autobiography of Ankhthifi; see Lichtheim, op. cit. and J. Vandier, Mo'alla: La tombe d'Ankhthifi et la tombe de Sebekhotep, Bibliothèque d'étude, 18, Cairo (1950).

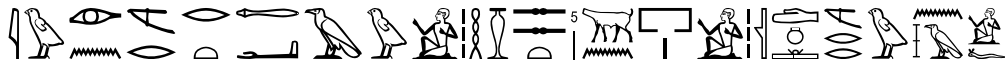
¹² Gardiner (§178).

I was a priest of slaughtering and offering in two temples on behalf (lit. the head) of the ruler. I have made offerings on behalf of (lit. for) 13 rulers; never was wrongdoing (of things) in me.



n(i) iw^{3d} n(i) psg^e m irti n nfrt n dd(.i) n rh n nk(3.i) n h3m n rmn(.i)^f

I did not steal. I was not spat in the eyes, because of the beauty of my speech, because of the knowledge of my counsel, (and) because of the bending of my shoulder (to show respect to others).

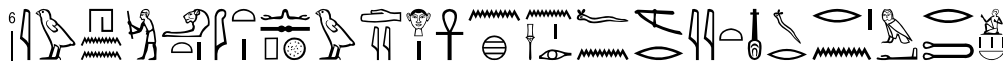


iw ir.n(.i) mrrt^{3w} hzzt hnw^g kd mrrw n zm3yw.f^h



iw hnt.n(.i) r h3t iw zb.n(.i) r im3h

I have done what the great ones desired, what the people of the Residence praised. (I am) a character beloved of his companions. I have advanced to the fore,¹³ I have attained (lit. to) honored state.



iw hnn(.n) h3t(i.i) m3^ct n(i) zpⁱ wdy(.i) hr^c nh n shm-ir(y).f n mryt^j nfr rn(.i) m-^c r(m)t



n(i) dd(.i) grg r^c nh bwt inpw iw grt snd hpr(.w) kt stw(t)^k nwt tn

My heart acquiesced to Maat. (Lit. My heart inclined to the feather.)¹⁴ I have never delivered a living person to a potentate so that (lit. in order that) my name is good among all men. I never told lies against a living person, an abomination of Anubis, moreover when another (town) feared, this town had reason (lit. was caused) to be pleased.¹⁵

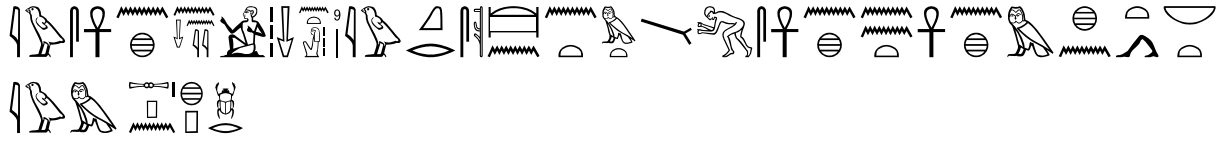


¹³ Allen's translation, see (18. 3).

¹⁴ A reference to the successful outcome of the weighing of the heart ceremony usually depicted in the Book of the Dead. This interpretation (equating the feather with Maat) has been put forward by Jansen-Winkeln: 'Mein Hertz neigte die Feder.'

¹⁵ Jansen-Winkeln reads this passage as *iw grt sndw(.i) hpr(.w) (r) mkt swti nwt(.i) tn* 'Furcht vor mir entstand (nur) um zu schützen und mächtig zu machen diese (meine) Stadt' which roughly corresponds to "My fear had arisen to protect, (and) to make this my city mighty."

iw in.n(.i) ihw in.n(.i) r(m)t in.n(.i) 3hwt in.n(.i) hmt



iw s^cnh.n(.i) snw snwt iw krs.n(.i) nt(i)¹ mwt(.w) s^cnh.n(.i) nt(i) ^cnh(.w) m-hnt nbt

iw^m m t3z(w) pn hpr

I got cattle, people, arable lands and copper. I nourished my brothers and sisters. I buried the (one who was) dead, nourished the living (lit. the one who was alive) facing (lit. in the face of) anything while (it was) this famine (that) was happening.



iw htm.n(.i) 3hwt.sn i3wt.sn nbt m nwt m sht



rdi(.i)ⁿ mh mw.sn n ky m^o ir nds ikr nb^p h(3)wt.f

I sealed off all their fields and mounds in town and in the countryside; acting as an excellent commander (lit. it is according as an excellent commoner acts that) I did not allow their water to inundate for someone else (lit. another) so that his folks may swim.



iw hpr.n^q di(.i)^r di.t(w) sm^ci n nwt iw d3.n(.i) s(t) ^cs3 zpw



di.n(.i) ^ch^c sm^ci h^d ^ch^c n hmi h3.n(.i) n z(i) nb m mrt.f

It happened that I caused that Upper Egyptian barley be given (lit. one may give) to the town, I transported it many times. I gave a heap of white Upper Egyptian barley and a heap of *hmi*-barley measured for every man according to his wish.

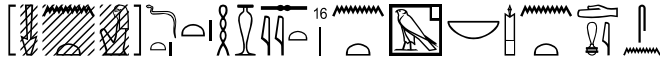


hmt.f mrt.f nt dt hkr(t) (n)swt w^ctt hm-ntr hwt-hrw dmi.s-n.i^s nfrt dd ^cb3t^t iht-^cbt^u t-hd




hnmwt m mrrt nb(t) smst ib m mrt n nbt

His wife, his beloved, of the estate, sole royal ornament, priestess of Hathor, Demiosnai, beautiful of speech, who presents offerings of white bread, who pleases with all that one desires, (and) who serves the heart with all that one wishes.




snt-dt hzyt nt nb(t) hwt-hrw iwnt dmi.s-n(.i)

Sister-of-the-estate¹⁶ (of a mortuary endowment), blessed of Hathor lady of Dendera, Demiosnai.

- a. If two or three *n*'s meet (except for  *mw*) one is usually suppressed in writing; see e. g. line 6.
- b. Even in the First Intermediate Period, 13 rulers are far more than Merer could have possibly served under. As Lichtheim observed, these rulers must have included deceased ones to make offerings to.
- c. Typical use of the negated indicative/perfective *sdm.f.*¹⁷
- d. Negated indicative/perfective *sdm.f.* of the verb *ʿw3i* “steal, rob” with variant spelling.
- e. Lichtheim¹⁸ made a detailed argument why the voice here (and in the previous clause) should be passive (as opposed to the translations given by Černý ‘I did not spit in the eyes...’ and Shenkel ‘Ich habe nicht in die Augen gespien...’)

A further evidence that we have passive here is furnished by an example of Allen¹⁹ (for

negated passive constructions): 

 *ni srh.tw.i mm šnyt, ni gm wn.i m rw-prw* ‘I was

not denounced in court, no fault of mine could be found in the temples’²⁰ Here the first verb *srh* is indicative /perfective *sdm.f.* in passive form expressed by the impersonal pronoun *tw*. On the other hand, the verb form of *gmi* is a matching genuine passive.

Jansen-Winkeln²¹ challenges Lichtheim’s interpretation, retains the active voice, and transliterates the passage as *ni iw3(.i) ni psg(.i) m irti n nfr ni dd(.i) n rh ni nkn(.i) h3m n(.i) rmn* ‘(Ich stahl nicht,) ich spuckte nicht in die Augen eines Guten, ich sprach nicht (belehrend) zu einem Wissenden, ich verletzte nicht einen, der mit den Arm beugte.’ This requires him to interpret the two *n*’s after *nfr* and *rh* as the negative particle *ni*.²²

¹⁶ Lichtheim’s translation.

¹⁷ Allen (20.5).


¹⁸ Op. cit.







¹⁹ Allen (21.13) from [Urk. IV, 484, 9-10].

²⁰ Allen’s translation.

²¹ Op. cit.

²² Gardiner (§104).

Although he quotes Gunn²³ for examples, in other parts of the stela the scribe meticulously used , so that there is not much evidence supporting this. In addition, his interpretation requires breaking up Lichtheim's indirect genitive *nfr n dd* into two different clauses but the direct genitive of this phrase also appears in line 14 as an epithet for Merer's wife.

- f.  *rmn* "shoulder," also substitute of  *ꜥ* (with the same phonetic value) when the arm is associated with an action.
- g. Without the people determinative, a variant writing of the noun  *hnw* "home, abode"²⁴ and the context requires this to be promoted to "Residence."
- h. Following Černý and Lichtheim, the noun  *zmꜣy* "companion, confederate" is written here using the vertical variant of the phonogram  *z* in *zmyt* "desert" by sound borrowing. On the other hand, according to Jansen-Winkel, the 3-bird should be replaced by the closely resembling *tiw*-bird and  should retain its original meaning *spꜣt* "nome." With these we have *spꜣtiw* lit. "nome-dweller" ('Gaubewohner').
- i. Negated indicative/perfective *sꜣm.f* of the verb *zpi* followed by the prospective /subjunctive *sꜣm.f* of the verb *wꜣi* as subject.²⁵
- j. *n mryt*²⁶ introduces a circumstantial clause of purpose with adjectival predicate.
- k. *stwt* is the causative of *twt* with meaning "be pleased" in passive.
- l. In this passage the relative adjective *nti* (with archaic writing *nt(i)*²⁷) appears twice. In each case it is a marker introducing a relative clause as well as the preposed subject in two subject-stative constructions.
- m. The particle *iw* introduces an unmarked circumstantial clause with (suppressed) generic subject.
- n. Negated indicative/perfective of the verb *rdi* followed by the prospective/subjunctive of the verb *mꜣi*.

²³ B. Gunn, *Studies in Egyptian Syntax*, Paris (1024).

²⁴ E.g. see [ShS. 3, 119].

²⁵ Allen (20.5).

²⁶ Gardiner (§181) and Allen (26.22).

²⁷ Gardiner (§199).

- o. The preposition *m* governs a nonattributive (emphatic) relative form²⁸ of the verb *iri*.
The rheme is *m ir nds ikr*. The emphasis is brought out using a cleft sentence.
- p. Prospective/subjunctive *sdm.f* of the verb *nbi* in a circumstantial clause of result.
- q. Circumstantial *sdm.n.f*/perfect without expressed subject.²⁹
- r. Perfective relative form followed by (the passive form of a) prospective/subjunctive *sdm.f*.
- s. A possible meaning of the wife's name is: "she is joined in me. "
- t. The verb *ʿb3* means "to present," and the noun *ʿbt* "funerary offerings."
- u. *iht* is an archaic writing of *ht* "thing(s), offerings" (also in line 3 with regular writing).

²⁸ Allen (25.9).

²⁹ Allen (18.5).