

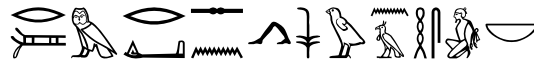
Two Boundary Stelae of Senwosret III

*“With mutual blood th’ Ausonian soil is dyed,
While on its borders each their claim decide.
As wintry winds, contending in the sky,
With equal force of lungs their titles try:
They rage, they roar; the doubtful rack of heav’n
Stands without motion, and the tide undriv’n:
Each bent to conquer, neither side to yield,
They long suspend the fortune of the field.
Both armies thus perform what courage can;
Foot set to foot, and mingled man to man.”*
Virgil, The Aeneid, translated by John Dryden

The First Semna Stela of Senwosret III



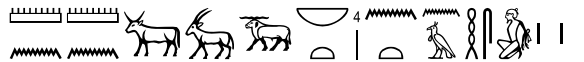
t3š rsi ury m ḥsbt 8 ḥr ḥm n (n)swt bit(i) Ḥ3-K3W-R^c di ḥnh r ḥh



r tm rdi zn sw nḥsi nb



m ḥd m ḥrt m k3i



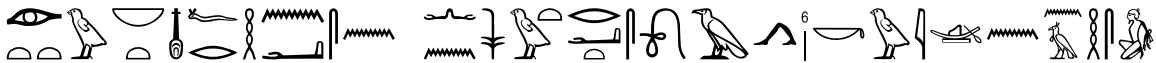
mnmn(t) nbt nt nḥsiw



wpw ḥr nḥsi iwt(i).f r irt zwnt m ikn



m wpwt r-pw



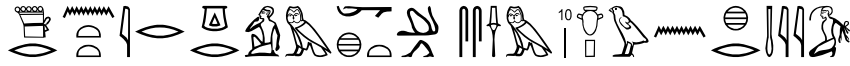
irt.tw nbt nfr(t) ḥn^c.sn nn swt rdit sw3 k3i n nḥsi



tm sfnw n hrwy ph sw phw ph.t(w).f



grw grt wšbw mdt mi hpr im.s



dr ntt ir gr m ht ph sshm ib pw n hrwy



knt pw 3d hzt pw hm-ht



hm pw m3^c 3rw hr t3š.f



dr ntt sdm nhsi r hr n r



in wšb.f dd hm.f



3d.t(w) r.f dd.f s3.f hm-ht(.tw) w3.f r 3d



ni rmt is nt šft st hwrw pw sdw ibw



iw m3.n st hm.f nn iwms



h3k.n.i hmwt.sn in.n.i hrw.sn



pr r hnmwt.sn hw ihw.sn



wh3 sš(r).sn rdi sdt im



ᶜnh n.i iti.i dd.i m m3ᶜt



nn hn im n ᶜbᶜ pr m r.i



ir grt z3.i nb srwdt(i).fi t3š pn ir hm.f



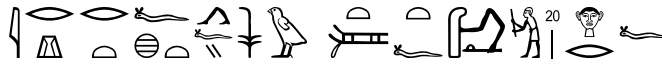
z3.i pw ms.t(w).f n hm



twt z3.i ndti iti.f



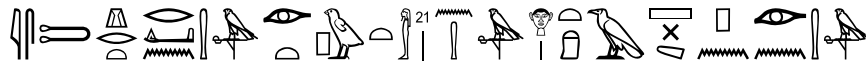
srwd t3š wtt sw



ir grt fht(i).fi sw tmt(i).f(i) ᶜh3 hr.f



ni z3.i is ni ms.t(w).f is n.i




ist grt rdi.n hm ir.t(w) pw twt n hm hr t3š pn ir.n hm



n mrwt rwd.tn hr.f n mrwt ᶜh3.tn hr.f


Vocabulary

 *t3š* border, boundary


 *rsw* south


 *rsi* southern

 *tm* not do


 *zni* pass (*hr* by)


 *nḥsi* Nubian


 *ḥrti* travel by land

 *k3i* boat (Nubian type)


 *mnmnt* herd (of cattle)


 *wpw ḥr* except

 *zwnt* price; *iri zwnt* do trade

 *iḳn* trading post is Nubia (possibly Mirgissa)


 *wpwt* mission, assignment, message


 *sw3* pass (*hr* by)

 *nḥḥ* eternity, forever


 *bḥdt* Edfu (town in Delta)

 *ḥrw* Horus

 *nbti* Two Ladies


 *ntri* divine


 *mswt* birth


 *(n)swt bit(i)* King of Upper and Lower Egypt


 *rᶜ* Re, Sun (god)


 *z3* son

 *mri* love, desire, want


 *dd* (adjective-verb) stable, steady

 *w3s* dominion


 *ḥsbt* regnal year

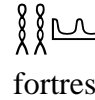
 *pri* go up, emerge, issue


 *prt* Growing (season)


 *3ḥt* Inundation (season)


 *šmw* Harvest (season)


 majesty, incarnation


 *ḥḥ* name of the Semna fortress


 *ḥnti* go forward, sail south

 *itiw* (fore)fathers, ancestors

 *swd* hand over, pass on, assign (office)


 *k3i* think (about), plan


 *3d* aggressive, angry, savage


 *zḥm* hasty, impetuous


 *m3r*


successful, fortunate


 *sdr* sleep, lie down, spend the night

 *hmt* intend, plan, take thought of


 *tw3(w)* man of inferior status


 *h3* stand, attend, go on duty

 *sf* mild, merciful


 *sfn* kindly, merciful


 *hrwj* enemy


 *sshm* strengthen


 *kni* brave, diligent, persevering


 *hzi* wretched, vile, miserable


 *hm* flee, retreat, retire

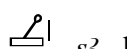
 *hm-ht* (compound verb) retreat


 *hm* coward

 *m3c* true, proper, correct

 *3r* drive away (*hr* from)

 *hr* fall


 *s3* back


 *w3* fall; *w3 r* fall into condition

 *sfi* respect


 *sd/sd* break


 *iwms* exaggeration


 *ms* indeed


 *h3k* plunder, loot


 *hnmt* well, cistern


 *hwi* plunder

 *ihw* cattle


 *wh3* pluck flowers/plants


 *s3r* corn, grain

 *sdt* fire, flame


 *hn* speech, utterance


 *b3* boast


 *rwd/rwd* firm

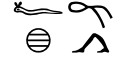
 *srd* strengthen, maintain

 *twt* image

 *nd* save, protect

 *ndti* protector, savior

 *wtt* beget

 *fh* leave, abandon

 *h3* fight

 *mrwt* love

Grammar Points

Both stelae were discovered by Lepsius in 1844 in Semna, the second stela in two broken pieces. The lower part of the second stela was sent to Berlin. After packing, the upper part of the second stela and the first were forgotten. In 1886 the missing pieces were rediscovered by Insinger, and they ended up in Cairo for many years. In 1899 they finally reached Berlin, and the two pieces of the second stela were joined after 55 years of separation.


The First Semna Stela of Senwosret III

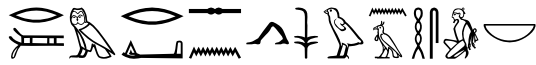
Senwosret III in his 8th regnal year (1862 BC) erected this stela just above the second cataract of the Nile. Mentuhotep, a general of his great-grandfather Senwosret I, already reached this point in the king's 18th regnal year, but as the stela states, Senwosret III intended to keep and maintain this position firmly.



t3š rsi iry m ḥsb t 8 ḥr ḥm n (n)swt bit(i) ḥ3-K3W-R^c di nḥ r ḥḥ

The stela starts with the noun phrase *t3š rsi*, where *rsi* is the adjective “southern” modifying *t3š* “boundary.” Just how important this “southern boundary” was to the Egyptians is clear from its foremost position in the text; it precedes the regnal year and the king’s name. The perfective passive participle *iry* “made” of the verb *iri* is easily recognizable. As pointed out by Sethe, the threshing floor determinative makes the difference between $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{☉} \\ \text{⊙} \end{array} \right\} \text{ḥsb} t$ “regnal year,” and $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{☉} \\ \text{⊙} \end{array} \right\} \text{rnpt}$ ordinary “year.” The prepositional phrase *ḥr ḥm n* followed by the king’s name is a typical construction: “during the incarnation/reign of.” In Senwosret III’s throne name (prenomen) *ḥ^c-k3w-r^c* the verb form of *ḥ^ci* “appear” is an active participle and the whole phrase can be translated as “Apparent one of Re’s life force/spirit.” The well-known participial phrase

 *di nḥ* “given life” is passive, and it is probably the abbreviation of *di n.f nḥ*: “to whom life has been given.”



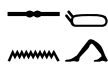
r tm rdi zn sw nḥsi nb





m ḥd m ḥrt m k3i



mnmn(t) nbt nt nḥsiw

The object of the preposition *r* is the negative verb *tm* followed by the negational complement of *rdi*. The preposition expresses purpose and should therefore be translated as: “in order.” The verb form of  *zni* “pass” is prospective/subjunctive *sdm.f*, and the object *sw* refers to the border. The three prepositional phrases make the prohibition more specific: In the first two, the verbal nouns *ḥd* and *ḥrt* are derived from the verb *ḥdi* “sail downstream/north” and *ḥrti* “travel by land.” In the adverbial phrase



that follows the Nubian type boat  *k3i* is specified (as opposed to Egyptian type vessels  *dpt*). The prohibition also emphasizes three different kinds of cattle that are displayed as determinatives after the feminine collective noun *mnmnt* “cattle” for emphasis.



wpw ḥr nḥsi iw(i).f r irt zwnt m iḳn



m wpwt r-pw

 *wpw ḥr* is an Egyptian phrase for “except” doubtless derived from the verb  *wpi* “part, separate.”

The pseudoverbal *r* + infinitive construction clearly indicates purpose (of trading). The suffix pronoun of the prospective participle of *iwi* “come” refers to the excepted Nubians. The exact location of the trading post *iḳn* “Iken” is

debated; it is possibly Mirgissa. Finally, note that the infrequently used disjunction *r-pw* is always placed after the second noun or noun phrase.





irt tw nbt nfr(t) hn^c.sn nn swt rdit sw3 k3i n nh3i



m hd hr hh r nhh

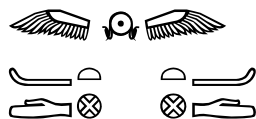
One would expect here the prospective/subjunctive *s_{dm}.f* of *iri* (with the impersonal suffix pronoun *tw*) expressing future command “shall be done” with following object “all good things.” However, the prospective/subjunctive of *iri* is *ir* and the presence of the double *t* contradicts this. Instead one has to accept that the verb form is the infinitive with *tw* as a dependent pronoun: “all good things shall be done,” lit. “one’s doing all good things.” The second clause starts with *nn* + infinitive indicating the negation of what follows. The particle “but” is in its typical place here indicating contrast with the previous clause. It is followed by a *rdi* + prospective/subjunctive *s_{dm}.f* construction with

the infinitive of *rdi*.  Heh is the name of the Semna fortress, one of the famous Semna-Kumma double-fortress at the southern end of the second cataract overlooking the Nile. Senwosret III clearly knew that displaying rhetoric of royal power in this stela was apparently not enough to control Nubia. Finally, *r nhh*, more frequently written as

 , means “to eternity, forever.”

The Second (Semna/Uronarti) Stela of Senwosret III

This stela dates at the 16th regnal year (1854 BC) of Senwosret III. A duplicate was discovered in the island of Uronarti, now one of the treasures of the Archaeological Museum of Khartoum. This duplicate stela was erected only 3 km from the first. The two stelae are practically identical.

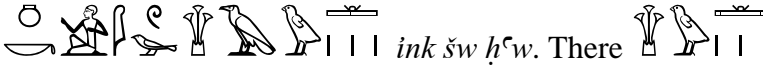




bhd(i)



iw rdi.n.i h'w hr swdt n.i

In the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor the herald, after trying to draw the attention of the

commander, states  *ink šw h'w*. There  *h'w* (in a *nfr hr* construction) means “excess.” In our case *rdi h'w hr* means “increase,” lit. “do

more than.” The passive participle of the caus. 2-lit. verb  *swd* “hand over” has a *t* ending and can be translated as “what has been handed over/bequeathed.”



ink nswt ddw irrw

The main clause is an AB nominal sentence with the independent pronoun *ink* as the subject and *nswt* is the predicate. The subordinate noun clause is also type AB, where *ddw* is the imperfective relative form of *dd*, lit. “what (I) say,” and *irrw* is the imperfective passive participle of *iri*, lit. “what is done.”

*“Hence the enlightened ruler is heedful,
and the good general full of caution.*


*This is the way to keep a country at peace
and an army intact.”*

Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Chapter XII,
translated by Lionel Giles.




k33t ib.i pw hprt m' i


This is an A *pw* B nominal sentence with A containing the imperfective relative form of

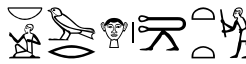
the verb  *k3i* “think about, plan” and subject *ib.i*. The B part of the nominal sentence contains the perfective relative form of *hpr* lit. “what evolves.” Since they do not refer to anything specific, both relative forms are feminine.

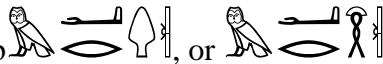



3dw r itt zhmw r m' r

3dw and *zhmw* are participles/nouns of agent⁵ derived from the adjective-verbs 

3d “be aggressive, angry” and  *zhm* “be hasty, impetuous.” The pseudoverbal construction *r* + infinitive in the first syntactically adverb clause has the nominal subject *3dw* and the verbal predicate has the infinitive of *iti* “take possession (of).” In general in a pseudoverbal construction *r* is used to express planned/inevitable action. (In contrast, in a


grammatically similar sentence  *nb wr hr itt*⁶ “a great lord is taking possession,” *hr* is used to express the imperfect.) The grammar in the second clause is

identical with that of the first and uses the adjective-verb , or  *m^r* “successful, fortunate.”



tm sdr mdt m ib.f

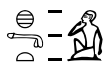
In the main clause the negative verb *tm* followed by the negational complement of the verb *sdr* is used to form the negated participle “(he) who is not slumbering.” In the

circumstantial clause *mdt m ib.f*  *mdt* not only means “word, speech” but also “matter, affair.” The meaning of this sentence is that Senwosret III will not rest (with) a matter on/in his mind/heart (until it is resolved).




hmt tw3w h^c hr sf

We have again a pair of causes here describing Senwosret III’s character. *hmt* is a


perfective active participle derived from the verb  *hmt* “intend, plan, take thought of” and can therefore be translated as “one who is thoughtful of.” As a verb form it also

carries an object, the plural of  *tw3(w)* “inferior.” Similarly, *h^c* is a

perfective active participle derived from  *h^c* “stand, attend,” and can be translated as “steady.” Finally, the *hr* + infinitive construction involving the adjective-verb

⁵ See the discussion at the beginning of the Grammar Points in “The Instruction Addressed to Kagemni.”


⁶ [Peas. B1, 123-24].

 *sf* “mild, merciful” emphasizes the imperfect, ongoing action.



tm sfnw n hrwy ph sw phw ph.t(w).f

The Egyptians love for word-play is clear from the next passage. As before, the first sentence starts with a negated participle using the negative word *tm*. In the negational

complement *sfnw* of the adjective-verb  *sfn* “kindly, merciful” the *w* ending is written out, and the phrase can be translated as “(he) who is merciless.” The noun clause *ph sw* after *hrwy* contains the active participle of *ph* “who attacks” and has the object *sw* “him,” referring to the pharaoh.

In the second sentence, *phw* is an active participle (with a *w* ending possibly indicating that it is used as a noun) “(he) who attacks.” It is followed by *ph.t(w).f*, a circumstantial clause with *ph* in the passive form of the subjunctive: “(if/when) he is attacked.”



grw grt wšbw mdt mi hpr im.s

Continuing the description of Senwosret III’s character, the text now uses the participle/noun of agent *grw* derived from the adjective-verb *gr* “silent/quiet/still.” The participle *grt* forms a one-word circumstantial clause meaning “(when/if) it is silent/quiet.” Similarly, *wšbw* is a participle/noun of agent derived from the verb *wšb* “he who responds.” As above, *mdt* should be promoted from “word” to “matter, affair,” and finally *mi hpr* (with *hpr* in the infinitive) is an Egyptian idiom for “properly, (with) correct procedure,” lit. “as evolving.” The feminine suffix pronoun *.s* attached to the final adverb refers to *mdt*.



dr ntt ir gr m ht ph sshm ib pw n hrwy

A noun clause is introduced here with the marker *ntt* which, in turn, is the object of the preposition *dr*. Together they correspond to the English “since/for.” *ir* is a marker of the topicalized subject *gr m ht ph*, and this marker can be left un-translated or translated with the usual meaning “as for.” In the topicalized subject *gr* is an active participle of the adjective-verb *gr* that we just met, and the infinitive of *ph* “attack” (used as a noun) is the

object of *m ht* “in the wake.” (This compound preposition we already met in the Instruction Addressed to Kagemni.) The topicalized subject is followed by an A *pw* nominal sentence (with *pw* moved forward within an indirect genitive). The causative verb *sshm* “strengthen” is in an active participle form with object *ib n hrwy*. This whole passage points to the advantage of being aggressive and defiant in war.



knt pw 3d hzt pw hm-ht

This is a pair of A *pw* B nominal sentences. The A parts are *knt* “bravery, valor” derived

from the adjective-verb *kni* “brave,” and *hzt* “cowardice” derived from the

adjective-verb *hzi* “wretched, vile, miserable” The B parts are *3d*, an abstract

noun “aggression” derived from the adjective-verb *3d* “aggressive, angry,

savage,” and *hm-ht* “retreat” derived from the verb *hm* “flee, retire”.



hm pw m^{3c} 3rw hr t^{3s}.f

Once again this is an A *pw* B nominal sentence. The A part is *hm m^{3c}*, where the noun

hm “coward” clearly related to the verb *hm* “flee, retire” above. The B part is

3rw hr t^{3s}.f, in which *3rw* is a perfective passive participle derived from the verb



3r “drive away” (*hr* from). Being a strong verb, the passive participle is indicated by the ending *w*.





*“When the general is weak and without authority;
when his orders are not clear and distinct; when
there are no fixed duties assigned to officers and men,
and the ranks are formed in a slovenly haphazard
manner, the result is utter disorganization.”*

Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Chapter X,

translated by Lionel Giles



dr ntt sdm nhsi r hr n r

In the Semna stela only  *m* is shown for  *sdm*. As the phonetic complements suggest the quail chick  should be emended here to the *nh*-bird . The introductory prepositional phrase *dr ntt* involving the noun clause marker *ntt* governs a noun clause. There are several interpretations for the closing phrase *hr n r*. According to Sethe, it stands for “the word of mouth,” Janssen and Gardiner⁷ render it as “fall at a word,” and Loprieno translates it as “a verbal attack.”⁸ In either case the sentence introduced by *ntt* is probably emphatic; *sdm* is a nonattributive relative form in the rheme: “the Nubian listens” (which is a given), and the theme (containing the new information) is *r hr n r*.



in wsb.f dd hm.f

This sentence is a typical participial statement introduced by *in*. As such, *in* should be followed by a noun/noun phrase which in this case is *wsb.f* with the infinitive of *wsb* used as a noun and the suffix pronoun as its object: “answering/responding him.” This is followed by the masculine singular imperfective active participle *dd* of *rdi* “(one that) gives/makes.” Since it expresses causality, the prospective/subjunctive *sdm.f* of the verb *hm* “flee” is used here.



3d.t(w) r.f dd.f s3.f hm-ht(tw) w3.f r 3d

This is a pair of sentences starting with the prospective/subjunctive *sdm.f* of the verbs *3d* and the compound verb *hm-ht* expressing contingency. (Because of the presence of the prospective/subjunctive the introductory word *ir* is not needed.) The verbal predicates are followed by imperfective relative forms *dd* and *w3* of the verbs *rdi* and *w3* “fall (*r* into a condition).” They can be rendered as “he shows his back,” lit. “he gives his back” and “he falls into aggression.”



⁷ See the Bibliography at the end of the Grammar Points.

⁸ A. Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 151.



wh3 sš(r).sn rdi sdt im

The passive verb forms continue in recalling Senwosret III’s exploits. In the first clause

the predicate  wh3 “pluck flowers/plants” can be translated as “cut down.”

The out of place “postule gland” on the back of the 3–bird was influenced by one of its phonetic values: wh3. (The Uronarti stela has the circumstantial *sdm.n.f*/perfect *wh3.n.i*.)

In the second clause the phrase *rdi sdt m* means “set fire to” with omitted object (shared by the previous clause).



nh n.i iti.i dd.i m m3t

This is an oath with a typical initial nonattributive relative form of the verb nh “live.” (In


other texts the “speaking man” determinative  follows this verb for further emphasis.)


In the following main clause an emphatic construction is used with the nonattributive relative form of dd. What is emphasized here is the phrase *m m3t*: “I speak in truth!” lit.


“it is in truth that I speak!”⁹ (The Uronarti stela has *dd.n.i m m3t*.)



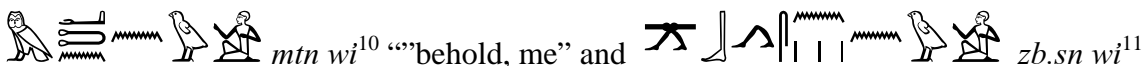
nn hn im n b pr m r.i

The negative word  negates the adverb clause *hn n b im* in which the prepositional

adverb *im* is short enough to be moved forward. From the nouns  hn “speech,

utterance” and  b “boast” the Egyptian idiom *hn n b* “exaggeration”

clearly follows. This is the subject of the adverb clause. Note the intrusive extra *n* that the scribe emphasized here for sound retention. Further examples for this are



“they will send for me.” This whole clause is modified by *pr*, the perfective active participle of the verb *pri*.

⁹ See Allen (25.11.4).

¹⁰ [Lac. TR. 78, 3]

¹¹ [Sin. B 171]





ir grt z3.i nb srwdt(i).fi t3š pn ir hm.f



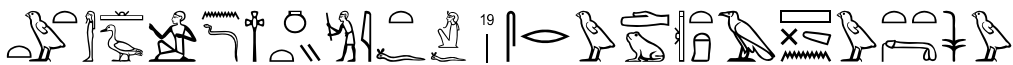
z3.i pw ms.t(w).f n hm

The protasis of this conditional sentence is introduced by *ir grt* “as for.” The topicalized

subject is modified by the prospective participle of the causative verb  *srd*

“strengthen, maintain” which itself is derived from  *rwd/rwd* “firm.” *srwdt(i).fi* can thus be translated as “he who will maintain.” The object *t3š pn* is modified by the perfective relative form of *iri*.


In the apodosis the repetition of essentially the same statement gives a clue that after the simple A *pw* nominal construction the verbal predicate is emphatic and involves the nonattributive perfective relative form of *msi* “bear.” In English, this emphasis can be brought out by the cleft sentence: “it is from the majesty that he is born of.” That the son is born is a given fact, but it is the son’s deeds following his father’s footsteps what will make Senwosret III to accept him as his own offspring. That this is indeed the case is also clear from a latter part of the text when this passage is put into negative using the *ni..is* bracket, a clear sign of emphasis.





twt z3.i ndti iti.f srwd t3š wtt sw

Senwosret III continues to remind his offsprings what it takes to be accepted by him. The first clause is an A B nominal sentence in which A is *twt z3.i* “true son of mine,” lit.

“image/likeness of a son of mine,” and B is *ndti iti.f*. The second noun clause starts with the participle derived from the verbs *srd* discussed above. The object is a direct genitive AB, where A is *t3š* and B is *wtt sw*. In the latter, the verb form is yet another participle

of  *wtt* “beget.” The clumsy translation “who begot him” can be replaced by “his


begetter.” It is not known why the scribe changed the determinative  to the frog  (in both the Semna and Uronarti texts). Note that Senwosret III’s “true son,” actually his




n mrwt rwd.tn hr.f n mrwt ḥ3.tn hr.f

The stela ends with a pair of adverb clauses of purpose. The compound preposition



n mrwt means “in order that,” lit. “through love.” In the first instance  is

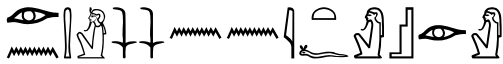
written instead of . Grammatically these are direct genitives in which the first part is

n mrwt and the second part is a perfective nonattributive relative form (used nominally)

of *rwd* and *ḥ3*, respectively. (The prepositional phrase *hr.f* at the end refers to the border.)

Another example to this construction is the following excerpt of the Abydos stela of

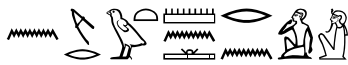
Thutmose I¹³:



ir.n ḥm.i nn n n it(i).i wsir



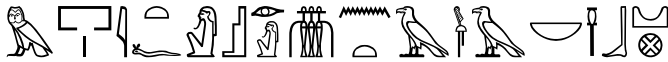
n ʕt n mrr.i sw r ntrw nbw



n mrwt mn rn.i



rwd mnw.i



m pr it(i).i wsir ḥntiw imntiw nb ʕbdw



nḥḥ ḥnᶜ dt

In the second line: *n ʕt n mrr.i sw* contains the imperfective relative form of the verb *mri*

“love” used nonattributively as the second part of an indirect genitival phrase: “(it is)

through the greatness of (that) I love him” (followed by a comparative). The third and

fourth lines *n mrwt mn rn.i rwd mnw.i* contain the perfective relative forms of *mn* and

rwd “used again nonattributively: “(it is) through the love (that) my name remains and my monuments endure.”

¹³ [Urk. IV, 100, 1-7].

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