The Bull Hunt Scarab of Amenhotep III

He lunged from side to side
Watching for his chance to seize the horns.
The bull frothed in its rage at this dance
And suddenly Enkidu seized its tail
And twisted it around, until the bull
Stood still, bewildered, out of breath,
And then Enkidu plunged his sword behind its horns
Into the nape of the bull’s neck, and it fell dead.
Gilgamesh, translated by Herbert Mason
The Bull Hunt Scarab of Amenhotep III.

**Vocabulary**

- `ḥsbt` regnal year
- `ḥr` (preposition) by, near, during
- `ḥ3` bull
- `nḥt` victorious, mighty, successful
- `ḥ3i` appear, rise
- `m3t` Maat (goddess)
- `smn` set, fix
- `hp` law
- `sgrḥ` pacify, make peaceful
- `ḥ3wi` Two Lands, Egypt
- `ḥ3` great, important
- `hpḥ` strong arm, strength, power
- `sttiw` Asiatics
- `ḥmt` woman, wife
- `wr` great, important
- `bīḥt` marvel, miracle
- `wnn` exist, be
- `smḥ` wild bull
- `ḥ3st` desert hills, foreign land
- `w` region
- `nḫi` sail, travel by boat
- `ḥd` go/sail downstream/north; `m ḥd` downstream, north
- `ḥ3wi` dusk, evening
- `ṣzp` receive, accept
- `tp-w3t` journey
- `spr` arrive
- `dw3` morning, tomorrow
- `ssm` horse
- `m3ḥr` army, expeditionary force
- `tm` (adjective-verb) complete
- `ḥt` wake, aftermath; `m ḥt` after, future
- `ḥn` command
- `sri` official
- `ḥnh` person, citizen
- `ḥrd` child, boy
- `k3p` royal nursery
- `rsw` watch, guard
- `ḥt` pull, draw
- `sbt` wall, enclosure
- `ṣdy` ditch
- `ḥsb` count
This scarab commemorates a wild cattle hunt led by Amenhotep III during his 2nd regnal year. The prepositional phrase hr m n followed by the king’s royal titulary is a typical construction meaning “during the incarnation/reign of.” Due to their compressed nature, the names in a royal titulary are notoriously difficult to interpret. In the (Living) Horus name “victorious bull” the ideogram representing k3 is not the cattle but the wild bull, and nht “victorious, mighty” is abbreviated to the mere sign. The perfective active participle of the verb h5 “appear (in glory), shine” is used, and accordingly the phrase h5 m m3t can be translated as “shining in truth,” lit. “(he) who shines/appears in truth/Maat.” In the Two Ladies name the causative (2-lit. and 3-lit.) verbs smn and sgrH are both in perfective active participle forms. In the Gold Falcon name, 3 hpñ is an easily recognizable nfr hr construction, and again hwi is in perfective active participle form. The throne name can be translated as “lord of the world-order/Maat of Re” and the Son of Re name as “Amun is content.”

The ‘great royal wife’ Queen Tiye was the most influential woman during Amenhotep III’s reign, later deified in Upper Nubia. Her name appears in many inscriptions (although not so much in the Karnak-Luxor temple complex). Note the feminine stative suffix of the verb nh.
Matching the feminine noun bi3it “marvel, wonder,” the perfective relative form of the verb hpr has a t ending.

The infinitive of iw “come” with impersonal suffix pronoun as subject starts the narrative: “one came,” lit. “one coming.” Another very similar example for the impersonal pronoun as the subject of the infinitive is iit.tw r dd n hm.f. ¹ The pseudoverbal r + infinitive construction emphasizes purpose. The indicative/perfective sdm.f of wnn introduced by the particle iw is used here to express general existence.

Another example to this is the well-known passage iw wn nds ddî rn.f. ² It can be translated as “there is/are.” hîst means here “desert hills,” not “foreign land.” w (with the tongue of land determinative) means “region.” According to Breasted, the feminine indirect genitive n nt should be replaced by r “as far as.” št “Sheta” or štp Shetep is an unknown place, but interpreting the story that follows, it must be somewhere near the Delta, probably in Wadi Natrun.

The narrative infinitive of the verb n't “sail, travel by boat” starts the action. In the prepositional phrase m ḫḏ “downstream, north,” ḫḏ is not the infinitive of ḫnt “sail downstream/north” but a verbal noun. Analogously, sailing in the opposite direction is expressed by m ḫntyt, where the verbal noun is derived from the verb ḫnti “sail upstream/south.” The means of transportation of the king is the bark wi3 whose

¹ [Urk. IV, 656, 14].
² [Westcar 6, 26].
royalty is expressed by the “sedge” \((n)sw(t)\) on the deck. The name of the ship can easily be made up from the royal titulary above.

\(\text{šzp tp-w3t nfrt spr m htp r w n št(‘)/št(p) ūr tr n dw3}\)

The absence of subjects indicates that the verbs šzp “take, receive, accept” and spr “arrive” are still infinitives. The feminine noun phrase \(\text{tp-w3t}\) is an Egyptian idiom for “journey.” A similar example is \(\text{wd3 hm.f…spr hm.f…rdit hm.f tp nfr}^3\).

\(\text{ḥt hm.f hr ssmt mšf tm m ḥt.f}\)

Once again the predicate ḥt “appear” is infinitive. The hunting scenes in Medinet Habu clearly show that the Egyptians did not hunt wild bulls on horseback. The prepositional phrase ūr ssmt “on horse,” which also appears on Stela S of Amenhotep IV Akhenaten marking the southeastern boundary of El Amarna, needs to be interpreted as the king appeared in a chariot driven by a horse. In fact, as the feminine ending in ssmt also indicates, mares were the preferred chariot horses. Similar use of language appears in Exodus 15:1: “… I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”\(^4\) In previous passages (Exodus 14:6-7) it is clearly stated that the pharaoh’s army pursuing Moses was comprised of chariots and the soldiers were not riding on horseback.

In the second adverb clause the adjective tm modifies mšf.

\(\text{sḥn.t(w) srw mšf ‘nhw nw mšf r dr.f mi ḫḏ.f ḥrdw n k3p r irt rsw ūr n3 n smw}\)

The infinitive of the causative verb sḥn “command” has again the impersonal pronoun tw as its suffixed subject. The subject is, of course, the king, and this use of tw “One” is reference to the pharaoh seems to be of occasional use in Late Middle Kingdom. The list of objects include srw ‘nhw “the commanders,” lit. “the officials of the army,” ‘nhw nw

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3 [Sebekhu 1-2].
4 Bible, King James Version.
“the common soldiers,” lit. “the citizens of the army,” and hrđw n k3p “the children of the kap/nursery.” Note that in some 18th Dynasty writings k3p resembles a wrist and hand. The attached apparent adjectives r dr.f and mì kd.f emphasize that the entire army with all its attachments was present. Finally, the pseudo-verbal r + infinitive construction expresses the planned action rsw hr to watch over/guard the wild cattle (with rsw in the infinitive used as a noun).

The particle ist marks the adverb clause in which the king commands (in circumstantial sdm.n.f/perfect) to drive the wild cattle into a walled enclosure with a ditch. The command itself employs the rdi + prospective/subjunctive sdm.f construction with rdi (as the object of wd) itself in the infinitive. Notice the (suddenly) missing genitival adjective n after nn in the plural demonstrative, a practice that started before the 18th Dynasty.

In Thuthmose III’s siege of Megiddo we can read i[H] m Sdy inH m xtw wADw n xtw.sn nb bnr. The Egyptian army surrounded the town with a ditch and walled it up (with new timber from fruit trees). As Breasted pointed out, the situation and the choice of the words iH “surround, net, catch,” “inclosure, ditch,” and inh “wall” are reminiscent to ours here. While the situation is analogous, it is not the same. The static meaning of the verb inh should be contrasted with the dynamic meaning of ith, and it is more likely that the wild cattle were driven (drawn) into a walled enclosure (with a ditch) rather than surrounded by a wall.

5 [Urk. IV, 660, 15-6].
The \textit{sdm.in.f} form applied to the verb \textit{wd} emphasizes subsequent action, the king’s next command. The command’s missing predicate makes little sense unless we follow Breasted’s suggestion and replace \textit{r} with \textit{ḥsb} “count.” The apparent adjective \textit{r} \textit{ḥw} with the plural suffix pronoun once again emphasizes that all the wild cattle had to be accounted for.

\begin{verbatim}
  rḥt iri smAw 170  rḥt in.n ḥm.f m bḥs m hrw pn smAw 56
\end{verbatim}

The verbal noun \textit{rḥt} “knowledge” is derived from the verb \textit{rḥ} “learn, know.” This, combined with the prepositional nisbe \textit{iri} is usually translated as “statement thereof,” lit. “knowledge thereof.” Although \textit{bḥs} “hunt” is a verb, as the object of the preposition \textit{m}, it is a verbal noun since the pseudo verbal \textit{m} + infinitive construction in the New Kingdom was used for the imperfect.

\begin{verbatim}
  wḥ.in ḥm.f hrw 4 m wš rdt srf n ssmwt.f
\end{verbatim}

As above, the \textit{sdm.in.f} verb form indicates subsequent action. In the adjective-verb \textit{wš} “unoccupied (of time), free” the hair determinative is because of the alternative meaning of \textit{wš} as “fall out, missing (hair).” The object of the infinitive of \textit{rdi} is \textit{srf} “passion, warmth, temperature” in a spiritual context means that the king let his horses regain their strength/spirit.

\begin{verbatim}
  ḥšt ḥm.f hr ssmt  rḥt nn (n) smAw  in.n.f bḥs smAw 40 dmd  smAw 96
\end{verbatim}

All the grammar involved here has been treated above.

\textbf{Bibliography}

\textbf{Text:} Cleveland Museum of Art; de Buck, pp. 65-66; G. Fraser, A catalogue of the scarabs belonging to George Fraser, London. Bernard Quaritch. 1900.


\textbf{Translations:} Breasted, II, §§863-864.