

# THE BUILDING INSCRIPTION FROM TELL EL-DAB<sup>C</sup>A OF THE TIME OF SESOSTRIS III


By Hans Goedicke

During his excavations at the ‘Ezbet Rushdi SHEHATA ADAM found a small inscription of ca. 20 × 30 cms. In his publication<sup>1</sup> he described it as “a stela of the king Sesostris III” commemorating “a deed which is somewhat obscure”. It was subsequently discussed by KEES,<sup>2</sup> who considered its concern “eine von vier Lokalbeamten beglaubigte Revision oder Katastervermessung” and by FISCHER,<sup>3</sup> who considered it a “land record” which he assumed “was intended to be displayed in the temple where it was found.” Like similar inscriptions of the same type<sup>4</sup> it is dated, in this case in its full form, “Year 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> month of *smw*, day 20 under the Majesty of Horus *Hprw-ntr*, Nebty *Mswt-ntr*, Nswt-bit *H<sup>c</sup>-k3w-R<sup>c</sup>*, Son-of Re *Snwsrt*, living eternally.” Despite the elaborate reference to the king, it is not a royal inscription and it does not indicate that the king was involved in the matter the text concerns.

The topic is stated as *mḥ n ḥwt Imn-m-ḥ3t m3<sup>c</sup> ḥrw*, which has found different interpretations. ADAM gave for it “the temple settlement of Amenemhat, the blessed, ...was enlarged (lit. filled),” to which KEES justly objected on philological grounds, giving instead “Das Ellenmaß des Hauses des seligen Amenemhet”, while FISCHER has “the (land) cubits belonging to the Estate of Amenemhet.” As there can be no doubt that the inscription concerns the building in which it was found, although the exact circumstances were not conveyed by the excavator, these genitival interpretations pose a quandary. If *mḥ* refers to an area, it would be identical with the edifice erected on it, i.e., it should read something like “the area of the *ḥwt* of Amenemhet.” However, once the building was erected, the size of the plot on which it sits became irrelevant, because it is iden-

tical with that of the building. In addition it is difficult to envision any purpose for such a measurement, especially in conjunction with the reference to a specific day, because once the building is complete the size of its area would be fixed. These considerations suggest that the relationship between *mḥ* and *ḥwt* is not a genitival but a datival one. This requires reading “the acreage for the edifice of Amenemhet, the blessed.... is.” Such a datival interpretation of *n* also suits the two other occurrences of *mḥ*, namely as a quote from a deed as “acreage for X.” The term *mḥ* is also found in Pap. Reisner denoting a lot where construction is going on and was rendered by SIMPSON as “project.”<sup>5</sup>

If the text dated to a specific day in the reign of Sesostris III concerns a “plot of land for the *ḥwt* of Amenemhet”, it results that at the indicated date the building had not yet been erected but that the land for it was established. The text does not specify the type of building to be built but gives the generic term *ḥwt*.<sup>6</sup> There are, however, several qualifications following it. The first is the name *Imn-m-ḥ3t*. Although any identification of the person is missing, an identification as a king of the Twelfth Dynasty is beyond doubt; since Amenemhet I had a building identified as *d3d3w* in the vicinity which had been restored by Sesostris III,<sup>7</sup> the identification with the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty can be considered certain. The use of *m3<sup>c</sup> ḥrw* after the name of the deceased king is paralleled in his mentions in the *ḥtp-nswt-dī*-formula.<sup>8</sup>

This *ḥwt-Imn-m-ḥ3t* has the additional qualification by the genitive *nt* , indicating that the building to be constructed was a specific one, i.e., that it had a predecessor which had been part of the

<sup>1</sup> SH. ADAM, *ASAE* 56 (1959), 216, pl. IX.

<sup>2</sup> H. KEES, *Ein Handelsplatz des MR im Nordostdelta*, *MDIAK* 18 (1962), 4.

<sup>3</sup> H. G. FISCHER, *Land Records on Stelae of the Twelfth Dynasty*, *RdE* 13 (1961), 107–109.

<sup>4</sup> Cairo 20181; Univ. College London 10712.

<sup>5</sup> W. K. SIMPSON, *Papyrus Reisner I*, 1963, 35f.; idem, *Papyrus*

*Reisner III*, 1969, 40; cf. Also BERLEY, *BiOr* 22 (1965), 265.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. P. SPENCER, *The Egyptian Temple*, 1984, 21ff.

<sup>7</sup> L. HABACHI, *ASAE* 52, 1954, 448–458, pl. 2–4; P. JÁNOSI, *E&L* 4 (1994), 22–27.

<sup>8</sup> W. BARTA, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, *ÄF* 24, 1988, 58f.

place. This is corroborated by the second occurrence of the place-name. It is traditionally read *R3-w3ty* “the beginning of the two roads”<sup>9</sup> in parallelism with the term *r3-w3t*, “beginning of the road”, in the Story of the Eloquent Peasant,<sup>10</sup> and its extended use as a compound preposition “in the neighborhood”.<sup>11</sup> The “Two paths” whose beginning is marked by this place-name do not appear to lead into inhabited areas, i.e. Egypt proper, but refer to the ways connecting the eastern Delta with Egypt’s border, which lay somewhat further east. These two roads are marked in the map provided by the Napoleonic expedition,<sup>12</sup> one running more or less along the southern edge of what is now the Lake Menzaleh, the other passing further south to join at Qantara. To be specified as *w3t* can be taken as an indication that they were considered established “roads” within the realm of Egyptian authority and not desert tracks outside of it for which the term *mꜥt* would be used.<sup>13</sup>


To sum up the result of the analysis so far, the stela concerns a “(building) plot for the edifice of Amenemhet, the blessed, of *R3-w3ty*”, and which was apparently to be replaced.

The plot has three specifications, two concerning its location and one its size. As for the latter, *mꜥ* as an areal measure is 100 square cubits, i.e., a space of 2,600 square cubits.<sup>14</sup> As for the location, it is *nty m mw nyw niwt tn* and *mꜥty ꜥwt R3-w3ty-ꜥtyt*, i.e. “which is in the water of this town”, and “north (of) Khety’s enclosure of *R3-w3ty*”. The reference to the place’s “Water” concerns the administrative authority, i.e., the plot, which, though located outside the place *R3-w3ty* fell under the local authority.<sup>15</sup> As *ꜥtyt* is a nisbe adjective derived from the royal name *ꜥty*,

the proceeding *ꜥwt R3-w3ty* should be recognized as a compound and rendered “*R3-w3ty*’s enclosure”, whose construction is attributed to a Khety, unquestionably a Heracleopolitan king of this name. The information is a possible hint that the original town-wall of *R3-w3ty* was to the south of the place where the inscription was found.

In the establishing of the building plot four persons participate. Their presence is due to the likely purpose of the intended edifice. They are:


“the Foreman, the Assistant Sealer, the Sempriest *ꜥp*.”

The man whose name is too common to allow an identification was the highest ranking official. FISCHER<sup>16</sup> followed KEES (*op. cit.* 10) in dividing the title into “director of the treasury” and “assistant of the *stm*-priest”. While *ꜥry-ꜥ n ꜥtmw* is well paralleled,<sup>17</sup> there is no parallel for *ꜥrp ꜥtm*. As a result, I would consider *ꜥrp* not as a title, but as a specification of the position in the administrative process.<sup>18</sup> The priestly designation  is well attested,<sup>19</sup> but not with any such qualification as FISCHER has proposed. Although there does not seem to be a direct reference to a superior authority, it is likely that this official represented something in this vein.

“The overseer of the cemetery *ꜥr-<m>-s3.f*”

The emendation of the name is based on the paralleled form,<sup>20</sup> while *\*ꜥr-s3.f* is not known. Although the designation does not seem paralleled, *wꜥrt* occurs in various titles which are associated with the necropolis.<sup>21</sup>

„The one in charge of the work ... the chief major-domo *S3-Sbk*“


KEES had rendered “der Bauaufseher, Hausobere (und)  (Vorarbeiter?) Sisobek.” *Jry-k3t* is a

<sup>9</sup> Cf. KEES, *op. cit.* 2f.; 8ff.

<sup>10</sup> Peasant R 49.

<sup>11</sup> Wb II 396, 5 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Déscription de l'Égypte*, Atlas, Pl. 30–31.

<sup>13</sup> The title  of the Sixth Dynasty of a *ꜥkn-ꜥnmw*, which KEES, *op. cit.* 4, following S. HASSAN, *Excavations at Giza VII*, 1953, 49, considers as the “Way of Horus” linking Egypt and the Levant, should rather be taken as a variant to *w3t-nswt*, i.e., the “kings’s (processional) road.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. K. BAER, A Note on Egyptian Units of Area, *JNES* 15 (1956), 113–117.

<sup>15</sup> The metaphor of “water” to express togetherness is found in *ꜥr mw*, “to be on somebody’s water”, but also in the extension of *dmi*, “watering place” to “village”.

<sup>16</sup> H. G. FISCHER, *Egyptian Titles of the Middle Kingdom*, 1985, no 1173 a; 140 a; W. A. WARD, *Index of Egyptian administrative and religious titles of the Middle Kingdom*, 1982, 221 had rendered “Assistant Sealer of the *stm*-priest.”



<sup>17</sup> WARD, *op. cit.* Nos. 1487–1490.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. WARD, *op. cit.* No. 1133. The writing with a determinative makes it clear that it is not a “title” but a position. This kind of specification occurs also in Sinai; for samples, see J. ČERNÝ, *The inscriptions of Sinai*, II, 1955, 231.

<sup>19</sup> WARD, *op. cit.* No. 1465. For the reading, cf. A. H. GARDINER, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 1, 1946, 39.

<sup>20</sup> H. RANKE, *Die Ägyptischen Personennamen* I 248, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. WARD, *op. cit.* nos, 116–119; cf. also Wb. I 288, 2.

description of the man's part in the project rather than a professional title, as WARD (*op. cit.* no. 551) seems to take it. The lacuna is a problem, because *hry-pr q3w* is an integrated term. As for the latter, ČERNÝ, *op. cit.* 18, gave for it "domestic and  or "domestic of a ", while WARD (no. 988) has "domestic of a *k3w*-worker".<sup>22</sup> As *hry-pr* is common,<sup>23</sup> it would seem best to consider the qualified form as "high major-domo". The name *S3-Sbk* is common; cf. RANKE, *op. cit.* I 284, 11.

"the director of this town *Hr-m-h3t jr.*, son of *Hr-m-h3t sr.*"

*Hrp n niwt tn* is not a title but a description of the man's position. For the name, see RANKE, *op. cit.* 248, 3.

The four persons named are the "assistant sealer", who might also have acted as Sem-priest, the overseer of the necropolis, the one in charge of the work and the local major. There is no reference to royal authority, so that it seems that the projected construction was a local affair. There is hardly any reference to any religious aspect of the building, but the mention of the "overseer of the necropolis" might be significant.

If the text concerns an edifice named *hwt-Jmn-m-h3t*, either as a replacement or as a new institution, the question to be asked is the purpose of the intended structure. As stressed before, the text is not a royal document and there is no reference to royal authority in it. The persons listed in the deed are basically local dignitaries under whose auspices the building was to be made.

The building has been called a "temple" by Shehata Adam, but there is no inscriptional and hardly any archaeological evidence justifying such an identification if it is to be envisioned as place of religious worship. The lower part of a royal statue was found in it, but neither is the royal name known, nor is there evidence for a royal worship at this time. This does not abrogate KEES' idea that it was a ka-house, provided it is seen as an edifice for administering the funerary needs of people receiving the privilege of a royal burial as a reward for their services.

The most unusual feature of the building is its conspicuous water installations. There is a conduit from behind the building, presumably for collecting rain water, and another leading into the building from outside, whose beginning is still undetermined. A dominating feature, where the two conduits meet, is a large water basin in the columned vestibule. The location is so conspicuous that its role whatever happened in the structure would seem inescapable. It is, however, not a feature typical of any form of religious structure where worship was performed.

On the basis of the few indicators the text provides, namely, the name "edifice of Amenemhet", its lack of royal administrative association, but its connection with the local "overseer of the necropolis", I wonder if the building should not be seen as a kind of "purification tent", i.e., a place where the funerary rites for a distinguished person receiving a "royal" burial were performed. From the little we know about funerary preparations<sup>24</sup> it would appear that the ablutions played a major role, which would account for the conspicuous water installations.

Once the building is fully excavated and published, with all its associated features, it might be possible to evaluate this building in a more definitive form.

#### Addendum

The preceding manuscript was submitted on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1997. Since then the edifice has been re-excavated producing data far superior to what was available before. As the new information basically corroborates the thesis promulgated earlier, it seems justified to retain the original text and to add pertinent information that has become available.

The re-excavation established that the structure was built in two stages, the earlier one, which forms the core of it, dating not before "die Mitte der 12. Dynastie."<sup>25</sup> This demonstrates that the excavated structure mentioned in the inscription as "*hwt* of Amenemhet" was not built by the first king of the Twelfth Dynasty, but considerably later. Although BIETAK<sup>26</sup> mentions an unpublished statue of a "Selket-Priester mit dem Doppelnamen Seschen Si-

<sup>22</sup> A. NIBBI, *JEA* 62 (1976), 50 rendered it "the domestic of the reis (?)".

<sup>23</sup> WARD, *op. cit.* 977.

<sup>24</sup> B. GRDSELOFF, *Das ägyptische Reinigungszelt*, 1941, 10ff.; JÜRGEN SETTGAST, *Untersuchungen zu altägyptischen Bestattungsdarstellungen*, *ADIAK* 3, 1963, 9ff.

<sup>25</sup> P. JÁNOSI, *Reliefierte Blöcke aus dem Tempel der 12. Dynastie*. *E&L* 8 (1998), 52; the date is based on the hitherto unpublished ceramic topology.

<sup>26</sup> M. BIETAK, *Der Tempel und die Siedlung des Mittleren Reiches bei 'Ezbet Ruschdi*, *E&L* 8 (1998), 18.

Hathor”, which mentions the name of Sesostriis II and the *hwt* of Amenemhet of *R3-w3ty*, there is no compelling need to attribute the building of the core structure to Sesostriis II and not to his immediate successor Sesostriis III.

As argued above, the text on the stela is not a royal inscription but reflects a matter of local administration. It does not concern the final alteration of the structure, but rather the choice, or assigning of a plot of land for the rebuilding of a structure at a new place. This structure might very well have been built originally under Amenemhet I, but for reasons impossible to define, was moved to a different location. The assigning of a lot for it occurred under Sesostriis III, in his 5<sup>th</sup> year. This plot, indicated as 2600 square cubits, is exactly the area of the central building and its immediate surrounding, as BIETAK has convincingly demonstrated. That the alterations to it, including the final surrounding wall, were made relatively soon after the original building, is an important piece of information provided by the re-excavations. How soon it was done, however, cannot be defined.

That the structure is not a secular building was clear from the very beginning. The universal

labelling of it as a “temple” would nevertheless seem doubtful. There are no indications whatsoever of any cult practices performed in it, neither of a deity nor of a king, deceased or living. The only indication concerning the possible use of the building is the discovery of several statues of distinguished private people, whose presence points to an honoring rather than a worship.

This fact supports the above thesis that the structure should be seen as ka-house in which deceased officials were prepared for a ritual royal burial in recognition of their services for the society and the king.<sup>27</sup> While Amenemhet I had been greatly concerned with the consolidation of the north-eastern border of Egypt, in which Tell ed-Dab<sup>a</sup> played a key role, after him it was only Sesostriis III who aspired to pursue an expansionist policy towards the Levant, which, however, failed.<sup>28</sup> It seems feasible that the rebuilding of the installation originally set up by Amenemhet I under Sesostriis III is in some form connected with this, though failed, policy.

Despite its limitations, the short inscription and the now consolidated archaeological investigation open historical aspects hitherto unavailable.

<sup>27</sup> For the *hwt-k3* cf D. FRANKE, *Das Heiligtum des Hequaib auf Elephantine*, SAGA 9, 1994, 118ff.

<sup>28</sup> H. GOEDICKE, *Khu-u-Sobek's Fight in "Asia"*, *E&L* 7, 1998, 33–37.