

The World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1550 BC)

Contributions on archaeology, art, religion, and written sources

Volume I

Edited by

Gianluca Miniaci, Wolfram Grajetzki

Middle Kingdom Studies 1

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I am a *Nbt-pr*, and I am Independent

Danijela Stefanović, Helmut Satzinger

Abstract

This paper presents the mid-Thirteenth Dynasty stela *Musées de Sens*, 325, as well as an overview of the meaning and significance of the title *nbt-pr* during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. Based on analyzed attestations, it may be suggested that *nbt-pr* emphasizes an adult, independent female.

The rectangular, round-topped stela (measuring 37 x 22 cm) of the *Musées de Sens*, 325,¹ executed in the silhouette style, and with incised lines and hieroglyphs, commemorates two sculptors (Fig. 1). Under the lunette, under the *udjat*-eyes, there are four lines of inscription containing the *hṭp dj nswt* formula:



⁽¹⁾ *hṭp dj nsw wsjr hntj-jmntw ntr 3 nb*

⁽²⁾ *3bdw wp-w3wt nb t3 dsr psdt jm(t)*

⁽³⁾ *3bdw dj.sn prt-ḥrw t hnkṯ jḥw 3pdw šs mnḥt ḥt nbt*

⁽⁴⁾ *nfrt wʿbt ʿnḥtj ntr (j)m n k3 n kstj² s3-tp-jḥw³*

⁽⁵⁾ *m3ʿt-ḥrw* (sic!)

⁽¹⁾ An offering which the king has given,⁴ and Osiris, foremost of the westerners, the great god, lord of

⁽²⁾ Abydos, (and) Wepwawet, lord of the sacred land, (and) the divine ennead who is in

⁽³⁾ Abydos, may they give an invocation offering of bread, beer, beef and fowl, (oil in) alabaster (vessels) and linen, all

⁽⁴⁾ good and pure things on which a god can live,⁵ for the *ka* of the sculptor *s3-tp-jḥw*,

⁽⁵⁾ true of voice

The register below shows three human figures, without any inner details. On the left the owner of the stela, *s3-tp-jḥw*, sits on a chair with lion's legs. On the right, facing *s3-tp-jḥw*, is the kneeling figure of his colleague, and the standing naked figure of his daughter *ptḥ-wr*.



⁽⁶⁾ *kstj ḥdrw⁶ m3ʿt-ḥrw* (sic!)

⁽⁶⁾ the sculptor *ḥdrw*, true of voice

¹ PM VIII³, 803-032-386.

² WARD, *Index*, no. 1561 (as *gnwtj*; for the reading of the title as *kstj* rather than *gnwtj*, see DRENKHAN, *Die Handwerker*, 62 and WILLEMS, *The Coffin of Heqata*, 401 f. [ap]. See also QUIRKE, in QUIRKE (ed.), *Discovering Egypt from the Neva*, 88-93.

³ RANKE, *PN I*, 285/1.

⁴ For the perfective relative form *rdjw* see SATZINGER, *LinAeg* 5, 177-88, esp. p. 179-80.

⁵ For the prospective relative form *ʿnḥtj* (feminine singular), in this formula with potential meaning, see GUNN, *Studies in Egyptian Syntax*, 33-4. The author seems to assume that this is a mere variant of a wording with the imperfective relative form, *ʿnḥt*, although he very clearly demonstrates (*op. cit.*, 18) that the prospective form is usually spelled in a defective way in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. It is, therefore, legitimate to reckon with prospective forms even for cases spelled *ʿnḥt*, without the final *j*.

⁶ RANKE, *PN I*, 261/22. Note the inverted *w*.



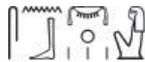
(7) *s3t pth-wr*⁷
 (7) (his ?) daughter *pth-wr*



(8) *nbt-pr nbw-hr-š(.s) m3t-hrw*
 (8) the lady of the house *nbw-hr-š(.s)*, true of voice



(9) *pth-wr*

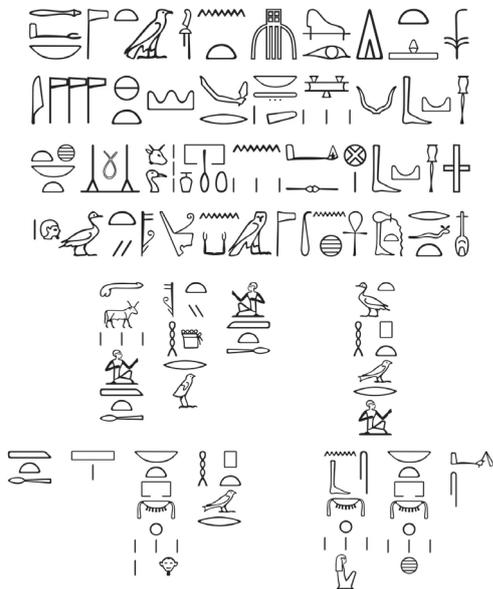


(10) *snb-nbw*⁸



(11) *nbt-pr hwj-sj-nbw*⁹
 (11) the lady of the house *hwj-sj-nbw*

The lowermost register shows four kneeling female figures separated by the captions and incised lines.
 The inscriptions in their original arrangement:



The two “ladies of the house” could be the respective wives of the sculptors.

The stela of the Sens museums can be dated with reasonable certainty to the Thirteenth Dynasty. Epigraphic arguments point to the second half of the Twelfth, or to the Thirteenth Dynasty, such as the expression *n k3 n* before the mention of the deceased, lack of a determinative for Osiris and Khentimenti, lack of the epithet *nb ddw*, or rather the sequence *wsjr hntj-jmntw ntr 3 nb 3bdw*.¹⁰ The style of the execution is a typical of work of the Thirteenth Dynasty.

An unpublished block from the tomb of Neferu (New York MMA 26.3.353) probably records the earliest attestation of the title *nbt-pr*. From the Eleventh Dynasty on, the title *nbt-pr* became the most common feminine title.¹¹ The exact scope of ‘duties’ of a *nbt-pr*, or the precise meaning of its literal translation “mistress of the house”, or “lady of the household /estate”¹² is still doubtful:

- a common mark of a married woman;¹³
- mark of a married woman who was (by her marital status) in charge of administering a household;¹⁴
- mark of a head of a household, regardless of her marital status;¹⁵
- mark of a woman who owned her own property, regardless of her marital status.

There are *pro* and *contra* arguments for any of the proposed explanations. It is well known that in many instances the title *nbt-pr* was a mark of married women, which is further clarified by the term *hmt.f*,¹⁶ or by maternal lineage of the offspring. On the other hand, the objects record dozens of *hmt.f* without the title *nbt-pr*. It is also not clear to what degree, if at all, the title itself was a status indicator. Still, based on its level of attestations, the title was a marker of social identity and the role of any given woman.

A sort of independent position of the *nbt-pr*, which

¹⁰ Cf. SATZINGER, *LinAeg* 5, 184-8.

¹¹ See MILLARD, *The Position of Women in the Family*, 262-6; WARD, *Essays on Feminine Titles*, 24; FRANKE, *JEA* 76, 231; TOIVARI-VIITALA, *Women at Deir el-Medina*, 15-8; SZPAKOWSKA, *Daily life in ancient Egypt*, 109; STEFANOVIĆ, *The non-royal regular feminine titles*, 7-9.

¹² Compare with *bēlatbēti* / *bēletbīti*, attested in cuneiform sources (for an overview see: LUUKKO, SVÄRD, in LUUKKO, SVÄRD, MATTILA (eds.), *Of God(s), Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, 279-94).

¹³ See WARD, *Essays on Feminine Titles*, 8.

¹⁴ See ROBINS, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 99.

¹⁵ See FISCHER, *Egyptian women of the Old Kingdom*, 20-1; ROBINS, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 104.

¹⁶ Note, for example, the stela London BM EA 152, where the woman named *nfr-twt* is the main figure on the stela; she bears the label of the “wife of a god’s sealer”.

⁷ RANKE, *PNI*, 139/6.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, 313/8.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 267/8.

was not preconditioned by marital status, should perhaps be deduced from the fact that it was the most frequent female title attested on scarab-seals,¹⁷ as well as by the fact that they were ‘owners’ of their own stelae. On the other hand, there are also examples of a so-to-say undetermined position of *nbwt-pr* when they are attested on family stelae without any obvious connection with the dedicator, and without any notion of their marital status - in most such cases the only conclusion which can be drawn is that the *nbt-pr* is a grown-up female. Furthermore, they could commission their own stelae, and be enrolled in a more specific professional activities. The following cases can, perhaps, shed more light:

Case 1: the *nbt-pr* *kjkw*

The well known, but unfortunately still unpublished, stela Louvre C 246 commemorates the family of the “king’s acquaintance”, *tjtj*.¹⁸ In the second register of the stela, several seated human figures (female and male) are depicted with accompanying text. The first figure to the right is the *nbt-pr* *kjkw jrt.n snt.j-mwt.j* (“the lady of the house *kjkw*, engendered by *snt.j-mwt.j*”). Within the same register there is her daughter *nbt-pr mmt (jrt.n kjkw)*. The third and fourth registers present more offspring of the lady *kjkw*: *mtj n s3 nfr-jw (jr.n kjkw)*, *nh n njwt jij (jr.n kjkw)*, and *nh n njwt r^cj (jr.n kjkw)*. She is not related to the family of the *rh-nswt tjtj*, “engendered by *mnw-^c3*, the vindicated”, and “born of *nt-hd*”. The stela also records *tjtj*’s two sisters, both of them being labelled *nbt-pr*.

Case 2: the *nbt-pr* *jwht-jb*

The main person on the stela London UC 14452¹⁹ is the *nbt-pr* *jwht-jb*. The stela has been dedicated “by her daughter Nubemwadj (?) who makes her name live, born of Renefres, true of voice” (*jn s3t.s nbw-m-w3d (?) s^cnh(t) rn.s ms(t).n rn.f-rs m3^c-hrw*). The stela also records “the man of the town Nebsumenu, her sister Nubib-[...], her sister Res(?)-[...], her son [...]”, and “her brother Ded”. Another *nbt-pr* *jwht-jb* is attested on a stela from the Collection of the School El-Salaam (Tiggart Library) at Assiut, TL 207.²⁰ However, the name *jwht-jb*²¹ is well attested during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period.

¹⁷ WEGNER, in BIETAK, CZERNY (eds.), *Scarabs of the Second Millennium BC*, 225.

¹⁸ See FRANKE, *Personendaten*, Dossier 732.

¹⁹ STEWART, *Egyptian stelae*, 34 [142], pl. 35 [3].

²⁰ MAHFOUZ, in FISCHER-ELFERT, PARKINSON (eds.), *Studies on the Middle Kingdom*, 186.

²¹ RANKE, *PN I*, 18/17.

Case 3: the *nbt-pr* *nbt-nhh*

Among the “ladies of the house” attested on the scarabs from Wah-Sut, the *nbt-pr* *nbt-nhh s3t nhw*²² is the most prominent. She is also attested on the stela London, BM EA 220²³ belonging to her father, the *w^cb nhw/s-n-wsrt jr.n hpji*. On this stela she is mentioned, without any titles, together with other members of her father’s family.²⁴ It is possible that the stela was executed when she was still young.

The *nbt-pr* *nbt-nhh* is also attested on three seal impressions. J. Wegner notes that “the impressions on the backs of the female sealings indicate that the scarabs of the women were used nearly exclusively for sealing only two types of objects”,²⁵ *i.e.* wooden boxes, and linen bags. Since *nbt-nhh*’s seal impressions can be associated with both wooden chests and linen bags, Wegner suggests that the sealing practice, as represented in the case of *nbt-nhh*, “is one of localized and repetitive closing and opening of containers by or under the authority of the woman named on the scarabs”.²⁶ However, her ‘professional duties’, her title, and her marital status (which is unknown to us!), are not related.²⁷

Case 4: the *nbt-pr* *h3t-špswt*

Dossiers of women are rather rare, especially those not related to their male kin (father, husband, and son). The case of the *nbt-pr* *h3t-špswt* is one of those. She is attested on the stela Cairo GC 20562,²⁸ commemorating an *jmnji*, as mother of the *nbt-pr* *snbt* and of the *sh3w n hnrw wr ntr-pw-ptj*. Another object recording her and her daughter is a stela from a private collection in Rome, published by A. Roccati.²⁹ The main person on the Rome stela is again *jmnji*. Although the four stelae, and one statuette, commemorating *jmnji*, allow us to reconstruct the lineage of four generations of his family, there is no

²² WEGNER, in BIETAK, CZERNY (ed.), *Scarabs of the Second Millennium BC*, 223.

²³ FRANKE, MARÉE (ed.), *Egyptian Stelae in the British Museum*, vol. I/1, 70-3.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, 72-3.

²⁵ WEGNER, in BIETAK, CZERNY (eds.), *Scarabs of the Second Millennium BC*, 225.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, 225.

²⁷ However, it is important to note that, according to the almost five hundred Middle Kingdom attestations (most of them from the late Middle Kingdom) of the title in question, collected by Stefanović, almost 80% of the individuals seem to have a very modest background and less than 60% were married, *i.e.* labelled as *hmt*, or specified as mothers, see STEFANOVIĆ, *The non-royal regular feminine titles*, 8.

²⁸ LANGE, SCHÄFER, *Grab- und Denksteine*, vol. II, 196-8.

²⁹ ROCCATI, in QUIRKE (ed.), *Discovering Egypt from the Neva*, 111-21, no. 4.

link to the *nbt-pr ḥ3t-špswt*.

Case 5: *nbt-pr nfrt-jw*

The *nbt-pr nfrt-jw*, recorded on the stela London, BM EA 226,³⁰ has her ‘own’ name-list of relatives, including a female servant: *s3.s nst* (?), *s3t.s jwht-jb*, *snt.s snbt*, *ḥmt tj-ḥpt*, *sn.snnj*. Neither she, nor any members of her family, are related to any other person on the stela.³¹

Case 6: *nbt-pr šrjt*

The late Seventeenth Dynasty stela Hermitage 1091,³² records the *nbt-pr šrjt*, wife (*ḥmt*) of *wn-wj* who “keeps alive” the name of her husband.³³

Case 7: *nbt-pr ḥr-ms*

The lady *ḥr-ms*, recorded on the stela (Brooklyn 07.420)³⁴ of her husband *šmsw sn-rs*, also “keeps alive” the name of her husband.

Case 8: *nbt-pr jrr*

The letter of *nbt-pr jrr* (London UC 32203),³⁵ sent to the person named *km3w*,³⁶ records that she was entrusted with women who are unable to weave. Their inefficiency caused that *jrr* could not deliver the amount of woven linen expected from her. Irer informed her superior that she was occupied with her duties in the temple.³⁷ The

³⁰ FRANKE, MARÉE (ed.), *Egyptian Stelae in the British Museum*, vol. I/1, 76-80.

³¹ Compare with the name-list of the *nbt-pr rdj-nt* on the stela Cairo CG 20450.

³² STEFANOVIĆ, *GM* 244, 177-8.

³³ NELSON-HURST, in HAWASS, HOUSER-WEGNER (eds.), *Millions of Jubilees*, 13-31; NELSON-HURST, in HORN *et al.* (eds.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2010*, 116-23.

³⁴ Late Seventeen-early Eighteen Dynasty; JAMES, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Inscriptions in the Brooklyn Museum*, vol. I, no 164.

³⁵ COLLIER, QUIRKE, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Letters*, 116-7; QUIRKE, in HAMILTON, WHITEHOUSE, WRIGHT (eds.), *Archaeology and Women*, 251; STEFANOVIĆ, *The non-royal regular feminine titles*, 5; LUFT, in GUNDAKER, BUDKA, PIEKE (eds.), *Florilegium Aegyptiacum*, 238; for the date see LUFT, in HAHN, KÁKOSY, KOMORÓCZY (eds.), *Oikumene* 3, 117-8.

³⁶ He is probably attested in pBerlin 10034 with the title *mr ḥwt-ntr*, see LUFT, in GUNDAKER, BUDKA, PIEKE (eds.), *Florilegium Aegyptiacum*, 239.

³⁷ Luft points out that “she is certainly affiliated to the mortuary temple of *ḥm-s-n-w^cr.t m3^c-ḥrw*, and that her complaint refers to the ‘weaver women’ who belong to the production zone of the mortuary temple in *ḥm-s-n-w^cr.t m3^c-ḥrw*”, LUFT, in GUNDAKER, BUDKA, PIEKE (eds.), *Florilegium Aegyptiacum*, 239.

weavers, subordinate to her, were “left abandoned, thinking they wouldn’t get food provisions inasmuch as not any news of you has been heard”. She stresses that her superior “should spend some time here since [not] any clothes [have been made] while my attention is being directed to the temple, and the warp-threads are set up on the loom without it being possible to weave them”.³⁸

Case 9: *nbt-pr snb-n.j*

The stela Marseilles 228³⁹ commemorates the *sh3w n ḥnrt wr sbk-ḥtp ms.n rn.s-rs*. Among the persons recorded on the stela, many of them being not related to *sbk-ḥtp*, is the *nbt-pr snb-n.j m3^ct-ḥrw*. *snb-n.j* is mentioned together with the *hrj n tm jb-j^cw*, *i.e.* their names are inscribed within the same field:



Whether or not she was the wife of this *jb-j^cw*, the children are noted as hers: *s3.s k^cw*, *s3t.s npnt*, and *s3t.s t3-nt-ḥnw*.

Case 10: *nbt-pr fd.nwt*

The *nbt-pr fd.nwt* is attested on two stelae: Cairo CG 20319 and CG 20403.⁴⁰ On both objects she is determined as mother of the respective dedicator: *ḥnh n tt ḥk3 nfr-ḥtp* (CG 20319), and *s3b r nhn ḥnhw* (CG 20403). What would suggest that it is the same person? The name *fd.nwt* is extremely rare. Ranke notes just one attestation (*fdw.nwt*), namely CG 20319.⁴¹ Although there is a slight orthographic difference



→ CG 20319 vs. → CG 20403

the fact that both objects were produced in a well attested Theban workshop from the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty, or the beginning of the Second Intermediate Period,⁴² would advocate in favour of her identification.

³⁸ WENTE, *Letters*, 82-3. See also QUIRKE, in HAMILTON, WHITEHOUSE, WRIGHT (eds.), *Archaeology and Women*, 251, and LORENZ, in TEETER, JOHNSON (eds.), *The Life of Meresamun*, 99-100.

³⁹ We are grateful to Gisèle Pierini for providing us with a high resolution image of the stela.

⁴⁰ LANGE, SCHÄFER, *Grab- und Denksteine*, vol. I, 331-2; vol. II, 5.

⁴¹ RANKE, *PNI*, 143/17.

⁴² See MARÉE, *OMRO* 73, 7-22; FRANKE, in POLZ, SEILER, *Die Pyramidenanlage des Königs Nub-Cheper-Re Intef*, 83, Anm. 275; STEFANOVIĆ, *JEA* 96, 214; STEFANOVIĆ, *CdE* 87, 17-23;



Fig. 01. Stela Musées de Sens, 325 © Cl. Musées de Sens - E. Berry

ILIN-TOMICH, *GM* 234, 69-84. To the same cluster should be added the stelae Tiggart Library, Assiut, TL 201, TL 202, TL 207, and TL 208, and London UC 14417. The objects can be assigned to the several subgroups, based on artistic and epigraphic similarities. To one such subgroup would belong CG 20403, Florence 6372, and Athens L155; to another subgroup should be assigned PÖRTNER, *Grabsteine und Denksteine*, vol. I, 3 [8], pl. 3, Florence 6373, Florence 6377, Florence 7601, Cairo CG 20642, CG 20319, CG 20431, Cairo JE 25967, Christie's London, April 20, 2005, lot 382, London UC 14417, and Asyut TL 207; distinguished subgroups are also created by Berlin 8802, Asyut TL 202, and Asyut TL 201, Florence 6373 and Toledo 1906.23, Leiden F 1939/2.46 and Brooklyn 07.471, etc.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, any of the recognized cases may be used as *pro* and *contra* argument for the marital status of a *nbt-pr* – they could be married (and thus widows as well), or unmarried (perhaps old maids, or even of the same-sex orientation). Still, what seems to be undisputable is that the title *nbt-pr* emphasizes an adult, independent person, *i.e.* a woman who was able to manage the economics of a household – with, or without a male owner, or to be enrolled in some other business enterprise.

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