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The Titulary of the Harem of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, Once Again

LISA K. SABBAHY

Robyn Gillam in discussing the harem of the Eleventh Dynasty king, Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, in *JARCE* 32 (1995), makes errors in the attribution of titles to Queens *Nfrw* and *Tm*, and fails to convincingly explain the position of the six other women bearing the title “king’s wife.”¹ Gillam’s discussion relies in part on one put forth earlier by William Ward, which in turn was flawed because it used Gabet’s out-of-date and incomplete 1891 publication of Queen *Nfrw*’s titles.²

Regarding Queens *Nfrw* and *Tm*, Gillam states: “The King also had two other wives, presumably his principal consorts, who both bore the title *hmt nsw wrt*.”³ In fact, neither of these queens held this title, as it does not appear in royal female titulary until later during the Second In-

termediate Period.⁴ The importance of the title *hmt-nsw wrt* is that it implies a ranking system within royal wives, and its appearance and use are important indications of the nature of ancient Egyptian queenship. Interestingly enough, the eight women who formed the harem of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep can be divided into groups based on the titles that they *did* hold, and distinctions of function and rank among these women can be made. This is the earliest time in pharaonic history that there is enough evidence from a single reign to be able to make such distinctions among contemporary queens.

In the following discussion I would like to illustrate how the titulary of the eight wives of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep can be used to distinguish function and rank. In particular, I would like to make clear the religious, not court, capacity of the six women buried within the king’s mortuary temple. I would also like to publish in full the titles of Queen *Nfrw* in hopes of ridding Egyptological literature once and for all of the erroneous attribution to her of the title *hmt-nsw wrt*.

The tombs for all eight wives of Nebhepetre’s harem are associated with the king’s funerary complex at Deir el Bahari. Six of the tombs are connected with six chapels on the platform at the back of the temple’s peristyle. These six tombs and chapels belong to: *Sḏh* (pit 7), *Kḏwīt* (pit 9), *Kmst* (pit 10), *Hnhnt* (pit 11), *Ḥḏyt* (pit 17), *Mḏyt* (pit 18). They apparently belong to

⁴ By the Seventeenth Dynasty *hmt-nsw wrt* is commonly used. The earliest use of the title is on Louvre C13, see P. Pierret, *Recueil D’Inscription Inédites du Musée Égyptien de Louvre II* (Paris, 1874), 5. Based strictly on titulary Louvre C13 belongs with monuments dating to the Seventeenth Dynasty, see my discussion in Sabbahy, op. cit., 258ff.

¹ Robyn A. Gillam, “Priestesses of Hathor: Their Function, Decline and Disappearance,” *JARCE* 32 (1995), 231–33.

² W. A. Ward, *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom* (AUB, 1986), 102–14, and 145, n. 111a, where Gabet, “Document Relatifs aux fouilles de Mariette,” *RT* 12 (1891), 217, is quoted.

³ Gillam, op. cit., 232. No reference is given for this statement, although later in the article Ward, op. cit., 104, where he refers to Gabet, is noted. I have pointed out several times in print that Gabet mistakenly copied *hmt-nsw sḏt-(nsw)*, as *hmt-nsw wrt*, see L. Kuchman, “Titles of Queenship Part II: The Wives of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep,” *JSSEA Journal* 9 (1978), 23ff., and n. 5; L. Kuchman Sabbahy, *The Development of the Titulary and Iconography of the Ancient Egyptian Queen* (Univ. of Toronto, 1982) unpub. diss., 172–75; and *GM* 72 (1984), 35, n. 5. This correction was also brought out in D. Franke’s review of Ward, *JEA* 76 (1990), 231. *Tm* has never been credited with the title *hmt-nsw wrt*. In the next line of the article Gillam gives *Nfrw* the title *sḏt-nsw wḥtt*, a mistaken transliteration based on the English given in the source quoted in Gillam, op. cit., n. 226, which is actually the same linen document Gillam quotes again correctly in *ibid.*, n. 230.

the earliest building phase of the temple, and were an integral part of the structure from the beginning.⁵

These six women have in common a restricted set of three titles: *hmt-nsu mrt.f*, "king's wife whom he loves," *hkrt-nsu w^ctt*, "sole royal ornament," and *hmt-ntr Hwt-Hr*, "priestess of Hathor," with slight variations.⁶

The distribution of their titles is interesting in that it is only on their chapels and in temple relief scenes that these women are called *hmt-nsu*, "king's wife." This title does not occur in their burial chambers or on their sarcophagi. The titles *hkrt-nsu w^ctt* and *hmt-ntr Hwt-Hr*, which are used in the burial chambers and on the sarcophagi, however, also appear on the chapels. It is also on the chapels that the king is depicted with these women, wearing his white crown with two feathers.

Hmt-nsu is the only queen's title and exclusively royal title that these six women hold. *Hkrt-nsu* is a non-royal title, although it was twice held by princesses in the Old Kingdom.⁷ This is the only time, however, that *hkrt-nsu* is ever held by a woman who is a *hmt-nsu*. *Hmt-ntr Hwt-Hr* is a title held by many non-royal women as well as princesses in the Old Kingdom, but it occurred only once in the titulary of an Old Kingdom queen.⁸ In the Twelfth Dynasty neither *hkrt-nsu* nor *hmt-ntr Hwt-Hr* are ever titles held by a royal woman.

The titulary of these six women of the harem of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep is unlike any queen's titulary of the Old Kingdom, and does not anticipate the queen's titulary later in the Middle

Kingdom. The titles of these women place them in a special group, with a special function and status. Compared to the titles held by Queens *Nfrw* and *Tm*, the titles of these six women tie them to the cult, and not the court.

The goddess Hathor was much favored by King Nebhepetre Mentuhotep. He erected a chapel for her at Gebelein, where on two blocks the description "Son of Hathor, Mother of Denderah," was added to his cartouche.⁹ Hathor of Denderah also figured prominently in the reliefs and inscriptions of Nebhepetre's funerary temple.¹⁰

King Nebhepetre Mentuhotep was also clearly associated with two other gods, Amun and Min. In fact the king was not so much associated with them as he was actually united with them. Nebhepetre appears in the tall feather headdress of Amun in scenes at Denderah and Elephantine;¹¹ and in Nebhepetre's funerary temple, the statue of the king in the center of the sanctuary is actually that of Amun.¹² In two graffiti from the island of Konosso, an ithyphallic figure wearing the feathered crown and holding the flail generally associated with Min is depicted among other gods and goddesses.¹³ In both cases this figure is actually Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, as one is labeled with his titulary, and the other with his name. The same feathered crown is worn by the king when he is depicted on the chapels of his six wives at Deir el Bahari.¹⁴

The god Min and the king were closely connected in the festival of Min,¹⁵ and the king was identified as Min in spells of the Pyramid Texts.¹⁶ One aspect of Min's cult is the existence of a harem on earth for the god. Titles

⁵ D. Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el-Bahari I-II* (Mainz, 1974), 64. These shrines carry the older name of the king, *Ntry-hdt*; by the time the temple is built he is *Nb-hpt-R^c*.

⁶ For the monuments and inscriptions of these six women see E. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el Bahari I-II* (London, 1907, 1910), and J. J. Clere and J. Vandier, *Textes de la Première Période Intermédiaire* (Brussels, 1948), 23-43. Although her shrine and tomb are along with the other five, no titles are known for *M³yt*.

⁷ *N-sgr-k³y*, Dyn. 4, H. Junker, *Giza II* (Vienna, 1934), 97f.; *I^c-mrr-Nbty*, Dyn. 5, who is also *hmt-ntr Iwt-Ir*; L. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-re* (Leipzig, 1907), 128.

⁸ *Mr.s-nh III*, Dyn. 4, D. Dunham and W. K. Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III* (Boston, 1974), figs. 2-13.

⁹ L. Habachi, "King Nebhepetre Mentuhotep," *MDIAK* 19 (1963), 39-40, and fig. 12. Hathor is depicted suckling the king as well, *ibid.*, figs. 7, 8.

¹⁰ Arnold, *op. cit.*, II, 33; and 83-84 concerning an Eleventh Dynasty date for the first Hathor chapel at Deir el-Bahari.

¹¹ Habachi, *op. cit.*, figs. 7, 8 and 19.

¹² Arnold, *op. cit.*, 33.

¹³ Habachi, *op. cit.*, figs. 20, 21.

¹⁴ Naville, *op. cit.*, II, pls. XII, XIII, XVI, XVIII, XX.

¹⁵ See II. Jacobsohn, *Die dogmatische Stellung des Königs* (Glückstadt, 1955), 29ff.

¹⁶ K. Sethe, *Die Altägyptische Pyramidentexte* (Leipzig, 1908) I, 141 and II, 483.

of female personnel connected to a cult of Min are known from as early as the Old Kingdom.¹⁷ The title *hmt-Mnw*, “Min’s wife,” undoubtedly the most important title in such a harem, is attested from the Sixth Dynasty or later in a text from Akhmin.¹⁸

Since Nebhepetre Mentuhotep identified himself with the god Min, it is tempting to see these six wives forming a harem to serve the king as god on earth. In at least one inscription Nebhepetre does call himself “the Living God.”¹⁹ This kind of function for these six women would explain not only their titulary, and why it differs from the other two queens of Nebhepetre, but would also explain their depictions with him on their shrines in his funerary temple. These women are *hmt-nsu*, “king’s wife,” only in a cultic capacity; they serve as consorts of the king-god, but not as queens in the royal court. In a religious capacity these women are also *hmt-ntr Hwt-Hr*, with its associated secondary title *hkr-t-nsu*,²⁰ for their function as priestesses serving the king’s divine mother, Hathor.

The titles of the other two queens of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, *Tm* (pit 15) and *Nfrw* (tomb 319), are completely different from the six women discussed above, and from each other. The only title all eight of them have in common is *hmt-nsu*. The fact that *Tm* is *mwt-nsu*, “king’s mother,” explains her separate set of titles. Gillam suggests that: “It is also noteworthy that she is nowhere mentioned as being a priestess of Hathor,”²¹ but in fact *hmt-ntr Hwt-Hr* is never found in the titulary of a *mwt-nsu*.

Tm’s titles are known from her sarcophagus and an offering table.²² On both she is *hmt-nsu*

and *mwt-nsu* with variations. She has only two other titles, *wrt hts*, “great of affection,” and *wrt hst*, “great of praise,” and an epithet, *hst ntrw*, “praised of the gods.”

Tm’s titles, *hmt-nsu*, *mwt-nsu*, *wrt hts*, and *wrt hst* would not be unusual as a set of titles for a king’s mother in the Old Kingdom. Her epithet *hst ntrw* is known from the Sixth Dynasty, but does not appear later in the Twelfth Dynasty.²³ As *mwt-nsu* *Tm*’s monuments date from the reign of her son, not husband, and it is possible that *Tm* was relatively unimportant as a queen during the reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep.

Nfrw’s titles are known from the inscriptions on the four walls of her burial chamber and sarcophagus.²⁴ On the west wall of the burial chamber her titles read:

iry-t-p^ct hmt-nsu s3t-(nsu) m33t Hr Sth
w3dt sdt hnw hmw

Hereditary noblewoman, king’s wife,
king’s daughter, the One who sees
Horus and Seth, fresh and young,
mistress of women.

On the north wall of her burial chamber her titles are:

iry-t-p^ct hmt-nsu s3t-(nsu) mrt.f
snqm m w3h m sty idt.s nbt im3t bnrt mrt

Hereditary noblewoman, king’s wife,
king’s daughter whom he loves, pleasing
in the columned hall by the smell of
her fragrance, lovable possessor of charm.

The east and south walls of the burial chamber give a much shorter set of titles. On the east *Nfrw* is called:

iry-t-p^ct s3t-nsu hmt-nsu mrt.f

Hereditary noblewoman, king’s daughter,
king’s wife whom he loves.

¹⁷ See H. Gauthier, *Le Personnel du Dieu Min* (Cairo, 1931), 109ff.; and C. Traunneker, “Un document inédit sur une famille de militaires,” *BIFAO* 69 (1971), 225. Local deities in the FIP tended to have harims, see H. Fischer, “A Daughter of the Overlords of Upper Egypt in the First Intermediate Period,” *JAOS* 76 (1956), 108, n. 52.

¹⁸ P. Newberry, “The Inscribed Tombs of Ekhmin,” *AAA* 4 (1912), 103. *Hmt-Mnw* is equivalent to *hmt-ntr Imn* in the NK, see Gauthier, op. cit., 110.

¹⁹ Habachi, op. cit., 52.

²⁰ R. Drenkhahn, “Bemerkungen zu dem Titel *hkr-t-nsu*,” *SAK* 4 (1974), 64.

²¹ Gillam, op. cit., 233.

²² Arnold, op. cit., I, pl. 25b for the offering table. G. Daressy, “Notes et Remarques,” *RT* 14 (1893), 30, and

G. Maspero, “Notes sur quelques points,” *ZÄS* 21 (1883), 77, XLIII, copied the sarcophagus text. Maspero mistakenly reads *hdt* for *hts* in the title *wrt hts*.

²³ In the titulary of *Wdbt.n(i)*, G. Jéquier, *La Pyramide D’Oudjebten* (Cairo, 1928), fig. 7; and *nh-n.s-Ppy*, G. Jéquier, *Les pyramides des reines Neit et Apouit* (Cairo, 1933), 31.

²⁴ See Kuchman, op. cit., 23–24, and Sabbahy, op. cit., 172ff. I copied the tomb inscriptions in April 1978.

On the south wall the inscription is broken and preserves only the title *sdtt-n[sw]*, “infant of the king.”

The titles on the sides of *Nfrw*’s sarcophagus are as follows:

West

irytp^ct [s³]t-nsu wrt nt ht.f
im³t bnrt [mr]t

Hereditary noblewoman, king’s oldest physical daughter, lovable possessor of charm.

East and North

irytp^ct hmt-nsu mrt.f

Hereditary noblewoman, king’s wife whom he loves.

South

irytp^ct hmt-nsu s³t-(nsu) mrt.f

Hereditary noblewoman, king’s wife, king’s daughter whom he loves.

For the most part *Nfrw*’s titles are within the framework of royal female titulary of the Old Kingdom, particularly the Sixth Dynasty. *irytp^ct* is a title given all the wives of Pepi II, and *w³dt sdtt* occurs once in the titulary of his queen, *nh.n.s-Ppy*. The title *sdtt.nsu* is an odd one for a queen; it is known for officials who serve under the king beginning in the later Old Kingdom.²⁵ *M³3t Hr St^h* is a well known Old Kingdom queen’s title, but it is only found once after this in the Middle Kingdom.²⁶ *s Nfrw* does not have the titles *wrt ht* and *wrt hst* which almost always

²⁵ A. Mariette, *Mastabas* (Paris, 1889), 270–71, D 38; G. Jéquier, *Le Monument Funéraires de Pepi II*, III (Cairo, 1940), 69, fig. 70; K. Sethe, *Urkunden I* (Leipzig, 1907), 261, 1, 13; 300, 6; 304, 14. For a somewhat similar title held by a NK queen, see C. M. Zivie, *Giza au Deuxième Millénaire* (Cairo, 1976), 163, g.

²⁶ In the titulary of *It-k³ūt*, reign of Amenemhet I, see W. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt I* (New York, 1959), 195.

accompany *m³3t Hr St^h* in the Old Kingdom, but Queen *Tm* has these two titles.

This is the earliest known occurrence of the title *hnwt hmwt*, “mistress of women,” which becomes a popular title in the Twelfth Dynasty.²⁷ *Nbt im³t bnrt mrt*, “lovable possessor of charm,” and *sn^dm m w³h m sty idt.s*, “pleasing in the columned hall by the smell of her fragrance,” are epithets unique to *Nfrw*.²⁸

Nfrw’s titulary appears to be transitional between the queens’ titles of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. Her titles are for the most part traditional Old Kingdom ones, and yet, a title like *hnwt hmwt*, used here for the first time, becomes incorporated into Middle Kingdom royal titulary. As sister,²⁹ and perhaps main queen of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, *Nfrw* must have occupied an honored position at court. Certainly the titles of the six women buried in the temple, and those of Queen *Tm*, do not indicate such an honored position within the royal family.³⁰

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²⁷ Held by *Nfrw*, wife of Sesostri I, MMA 34.1.10; *Nfrt*, wife of Sesostri II, L. Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königin und Privatleute* (Berlin, 1911), #382; *Mnt*, daughter of Sesostri III, H. de Morgan, *Fouilles À Dahchour I* (Vienna, 1895), 77, fig. 182; probably a daughter of Amenemhet III, Cairo Museum 43104; and a non-royal woman, *S³t-ip*, P. Newberry, *Beni Hasan I* (London, 1893), pl. XLVI.

²⁸ *Nbt im³t*, *WBI*, 80, 5. See Kuhlmann, “Ptolemais-Queen of Nectanebo I,” *MDIAK* 37 (1981), 269, b. *Sty idt.f*, *WBI*, 152, 10. Variations on both of these epithets were used again much later by the Divine Adoratrices of the Late Period, see U. Hölscher, *Post Ramesside Remains V* (Chicago, 1954), 28; and J. Leclant, *Recherches sur les Monuments Thebains*, I (Cairo, 1965), 376, and n. 5.

²⁹ Made clear by her titles, particularly *s³t-nsu wrt nt ht.f*, “king’s oldest physical daughter.” For a discussion of *Ī^ch* as her mother, making *Nfrw* Nebhepetre’s full sister, see Sabbahy, *op. cit.*, 178f., n. 25. Contrary to Ward, *op. cit.*, 113, *Nfrw* was clearly of royal family.

³⁰ Her tomb and its location also place her “rather apart as a personage in her own right,” E. Thomas, *The Royal Necropoleis of Thebes* (Princeton, 1966), 12.