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The king's mother in the Old Kingdom with special reference to the title *s3t-ntr*

von
Lisa K. Sabbahy

Abstract

The king's mother held a special position in the Old Kingdom. This is expressed not only in her titulary and iconography, but also by the fact that cults were established for her. This article explores the evidence for the king's mother in the Old Kingdom, in particular discussing the title *s3t-ntr* which was an important part of her titulary.

Just as the king's wife, *hmt-nsw*, in the Old Kingdom had a basic set of titles to describe her position¹, so the king's mother, *mwt-nsw*, had titles befitting her rank. Her basic title was *mwt-nsw*, „king's mother“, more commonly written out *mwt-nsw-bit*, „mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt“. Along with this title the king's mother could also have the titles: *s3t-ntr* „daughter of the god“, *ḏdt ht nbt ir(rw) n.s.*, „anything she says is done for her“², and sometimes *ht Hr*, „follower of Horus“³. *Ht Hr* was not a title exclusively for the king's mother, as it was held by queens who were not *mwt-nsw*, but *s3t-ntr* and *ḏdt ht nbt ir(rw) n.s.* were titles which belonged only to the *mwt-nsw*⁴.

Ny-m3ct-Hp, a Second Dynasty queen who was king's mother, had all these titles except *s3t-ntr*⁵, which was not used until the titulary of *Htp-hr.s* I, the mother of Khufu⁶. Her *s3t-*

¹ The five basic titles of the Old Kingdom queen were established during the Early Dynastic Period, see L. Sabbahy, in: GM 135, 1993, 85.

² Literally, „who says anything (and it) is what is done for her“, using the imperfect passive participle. Some examples of this title are written *ḏdt ht nbt ir.t(w) n.s.*, „who says anything in order that one do (it) for her“. The change is from the participle *irrw* to the indefinite pronoun *tw* as the subject of a *sdm.f.*

³ *ht* in this title is probably a shortened form of *imy ht*, „one who is behind“, Wb III, 347, indicating that the woman is in attendance to the king as Horus. For the similar queen's title *ht wr*, see L. Sabbahy, in: GM 52, 1981, 39.

⁴ The only exception to this rule is *Mryt-It.s* of the Fourth Dynasty who has the title *ḏdt ht nbt ir(rw) n.s.* on a now lost stela from Giza. The stela was copied by J. de Rouge, *Inscriptions Hiéroglyphique*, 1877, pl. LXII, and described by Mariette, *Mastabas*, 565.

⁵ Mahâsna and Bêt Khallâf, pl. 10.

⁶ Reisner, *Giza II*, 17, 39 and 46.

ntr title was written in the unusual form *s3t-ntr nt ht.f*, obviously patterned after the princess's title *s3t-nsw nt ht.f*, „king's daughter of his body“⁷. Indeed, *s3t-ntr* and *s3t-nsw* have parallel reference, for *ntr*, „god“, referred to the queen's father, the deceased king, while *nsw*, „king“, referred to the princess's father, the ruling king⁸.

V.G. Callendar in a discussion of the title *s3t-ntr* criticised a section of my dissertation concerning the titulary of the *mwt-nsw* in the Old Kingdom saying:

„Most recently, Sabbahy, in her study of the titulary of queens during the Fourth and Fifth Dynasty noticed (as others had done) that the title was always found in company with the title *mwt-nsw*. Surprisingly she later came to the conclusion that 'a *mwt-nsw* at this time is always a *s3t-ntr*, but this does not always hold for the Sixth Dynasty'. It does not hold for the earlier period either ... *Nfr-htp.s* is only recorded as *mwt-nswt*, and nothing yet has been found to connect her with a *s3t-ntr* title, but her titulary is also limited to one title in our records. Queen *S3s3.t* (whose titles are more numerous, but also fragmentary) is a *mwt-nsw-bjtj* without the *s3t-ntr* title, and so is *Hnt-k3w.s* II (whose titulary is well attested)“⁹.

Callendar does not give a footnote reference to *Nfr-htp.s*, but presumably this is the woman mentioned only as *mwt-nsw Nfr-htp.s* perhaps from the reign of Sahure¹⁰. Earlier in her article Callendar listed *Nfr-htp.s* as among queen-mothers whose titulary should not be considered in discussing the title *s3t-ntr* because „the paucity of records ... forces us to leave them out of the discussion altogether“¹¹. Callendar also includes *S3s3.t* among those to be left out of the discussion of *s3t-ntr*, but there is no reason to do so. As shown by a fragment from Tety's mortuary temple, *S3s3.t* does seem to have had the title *s3t-ntr*¹². Also, *Hnt-k3w.s* II is now clearly documented as a *mwt-nsw-bit s3t-ntr* in a fragmentary inscription from her pyramid complex at Abusir¹³.

⁷ L. Troy, Patterns of Queenship, BOREAS 14, 1986, 181, A 1/3, lists the variation *s3t-ntr wr(t)* as a title of *ḥnḥ-n.s-Mry-R^c* II, but clearly the bird written is the quail chick *w*, not *wr*. See T.G.H. James, Hier. Inscriptions in the Brooklyn Museum I, 1974, pl. 25, 68. James does not mention the sign, *ibid.*, 28. H.G. Fischer suggests emending the *w* to *tw*, making the text parallel to an earlier coffin of *ḥnḥ-n.s-Ppy* inscribed with the title *s3t-ntr tw*, „this daughter of a god“, *Varia*, Egyptian Studies 1, 1976, 75.

⁸ For the distinction *ntr/nsw*, deceased/ruling king, see also H. Goedicke, in: SAK 15, 1988, 113.

⁹ V.G. Callendar, in: SAK 18, 1991, 92-3. For my dissertation, see L.K. Sabbahy, The Development of the Titulary and Iconography of the Ancient Egyptian Queen from Dynasty One to Early Dynasty Eighteen, Univ. of Toronto, 1982.

¹⁰ Berl. Inschr. I, 22, #15004, and 28, #14108. Troy, *op.cit.*, 153, 4.10, lists this woman as the same as the *Nfr-htp.s* who was *s3t-nsw* in the reign of Dedefre.

¹¹ Callendar, *op.cit.*, 91.

¹² For *S3s3.t* as *mwt-nsw*, see Jacquet-Gordon, *Domaines*, 422-423; and for the *s3t-ntr* title, J.-P. Lauer/J. Leclant, *Le Temple Haut du Complex Funéraire du Roi Teti*, 1972, 91, fig. 89.

¹³ M. Verner, *Abusir III: The Pyramid Complex of Khentkaus*, 1995, 82-3, fragments 373/A/78 and 372/A/78 clearly show *mwt-nsw s3t-ntr*. *S3t-ntr* is shown again, *ibid.*, 207/A/78 and 24/A/80. There is

Callendar argues that the title *s3t-ntr* was given „in times of political disruption ... to endorse the candidature of a king who had newly come to the throne“¹⁴. The queens with this title „appear to have ensured the continuity of the line of kings when ... some impediment blocked the normal inheritance from father to son“¹⁵. Not only would this interpretation postulate almost continual political disruption throughout the Old Kingdom, but a good part of Callendar's concluding remarks are based on the erroneous assumption that *Hnt-k3w.s* II did not hold the title *s3t-ntr*: „As *Hnt-k3w.s* II was never a king's mother by default she would not need the additional religious support that would be given by the *s3t-ntr* title“¹⁶.

As can be seen from the list below, every known Old Kingdom queen-mother, except for two in the Sixth Dynasty, had the title *s3t-ntr*. It does appear that the original statement in my dissertation, that a *mwt-nsu* of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties was always a *s3t-ntr* but this does not always hold for the Sixth Dynasty, is true¹⁷.

| <i>Dynasty of Son's Reign</i> | <i>Queen-Mother</i> | <i>S3t-ntr Title</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 4 | <i>Htp-hr.s</i> I | yes |
| 4 | <i>H^c-mrr-Nbty</i> I | yes |
| 5 | <i>Hnt-k3w.s</i> I | yes |
| 5 | <i>Hnt-k3w.s</i> II | yes |
| 6 | <i>Sšš.t</i> | yes |
| 6 | <i>Ipwt</i> I | no |
| 6 | <i>ᶚnh-n.s-Mry-R^c</i> I | no |
| 6 | <i>ᶚnh-n.s-Mry-R^c</i> II | yes |
| 6 | <i>ᶚnh-n.s-Ppy</i> | yes |

absolutely no evidence, however, to support Verner's reconstruction of the title *mwt-nsu-bit nsu-bit*, „mother of two kings“, for *Hnt-k3w.s* II, see the gateway reconstruction, *ibid.*, 62, fig. 61.

¹⁴ Callendar, *op.cit.*, 108.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107. Regarding Callendar's chart, *ibid.*, 109: A) *Mr.s-ᶚnh* I should not be listed with the title *mwt-nsu*. She is listed on the Palermo Stone with other women who are mothers of kings, but they are not given titles as such, see Sabbahy, *op.cit.*, 32. B) *Hnt-t[...]* is not footnoted anywhere in Callendar's article, but must be the same name found in W. Seipel, *Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Königinnen*, (unpub. Diss.) Hamburg, 1980, 243. C) *Htp-hr.s* I did not have the title *m33t Hr Stḥ*. In fact it is misleading to include *m33t Hr Stḥ*, *wrt hts*, and *wrt hst* in a chart of *mwt-nsu* titles as they are titles of *hmt-nsu*. Certainly a queen who is *mwt-nsu* could have had these titles earlier as *hmt-nsu*, but they are not part of her *mwt-nsu* titulary. For the best example of the clear distinction between *hmt-nsu* and *mwt-nsu* titularies, see *Ipwt* I, Sabbahy, *op.cit.*, 97-9.

¹⁷ See n. 9 above.

In his study of the legitimacy of rule in ancient Egypt, Otto explains that kingship had a threefold basis: the effectiveness of the king, the king's birthright, and the actual mythological nature of kingship¹⁸. It is the second aspect of legitimacy, that of birthright, in which the king's mother played so important a role. She is the medium for the transference of royal power¹⁹, and the title *s3t-ntr* indicated that the *mwt-nsu* was passing divine birthright, and therefore legitimacy, on to her son.

The prominent position of the *mwt-nsu* in the Old Kingdom can be seen in the cults established for her. Such cults did not exist for a queen who was only king's wife. There was a *hwt-ntr*, „temple“, for the king's mother *Hnt-k3w.s* II at Abusir, in which space was also dedicated to the cult of the earlier king's mother *Hnt-k3w.s* I²⁰. Koptos Decree A provided for the *hwt-k3*, „chapel“, of the king's mother *Ipwt* I²¹, and another royal decree mentions the *hwt-k3* of the king's mother *ʿnh-n.s-Mry-Rc* I and her daughter *Nt*, also called a king's mother in the document²². The tradition of a cult for the *mwt-nsu* goes back into the Early Dynastic Period, for the cult of the Second Dynasty *mwt-nsu Ny-m3c-t-Hp* was still being kept up in the Fourth Dynasty²³.

Representations of the *mwt-nsu* in the Old Kingdom show that she had a set iconographic feature: the *mwt-nsu* is always depicted wearing the vulture headdress, or vulture cap. This vulture cap spread down over her hair, with the vulture's head above her forehead, and the tail going down the back of her head. The wings of the vulture spread down the sides of her head. When shown in relief the vulture head and tail protrude horizontally from the queen's head.

The earliest evidence for this headdress is found on five statue fragments from the pyramid precinct of Khafre, and may well have portrayed *Hc-mrr-Nbty* I, wife of Khafre and mother of Menkaure²⁴. *ʿnh-n.s-Mry-Rc* II is depicted with the vulture headdress in a stauette of her and her son, Pepy II²⁵. The hole visible above her forehead was for the addition of a vulture head, while faint traces of wings can be seen carved down the sides of her hair.

¹⁸ E. Otto, in: *Saeculum* 20, 1969, 386-407.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 400 and 402.

²⁰ H. Schaefer, *Priestergräber und andere Grabfunde*, WVDOG 8, 1908, 10 fig. 7, and 9-10 fig. 6. Also now see Verner, *op.cit.*, 172 and 163.

²¹ H. Goedicke, *Königliche Dokumente aus dem Alten Reiches*, ÄA14, 1967, fig. 4.

²² *Urk. I*, 307, line 12 and 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4, line 9.

²⁴ U. Hölscher, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Chephren*, 1912, 102-103, fig. 140-144.

²⁵ Smith, *Art and Architecture*, pl. 56A.

Other examples of the vulture headdress are preserved in carved relief. The seated woman determinative after the name of *Hnt-k3w.s* I on the door jamb of her tomb at Giza (G7000X) depicts her wearing the vulture headdress²⁶. *Hnt-k3w.s* II is depicted in the same fashion on pillars from her pyramid complex at Abusir²⁷. The inscription on Koptos Edict A of Pepy I, providing for the chapel of his mother Queen *Ipwt*, clearly shows the queen wearing the vulture headdress²⁸. The inscription of Djau at Abydos depicts queens *ʿnh-n.s-Mry-Rʿ* I and II, both called *mwt-nsu*, with the vulture headdress²⁹.

This seated determinative may well represent the actual cult statue of the king's mother. Elaborate seated determinatives of King Neferirkare appear after the word *twt*, „statue“, in the Abusir Papyri and are interpreted as depictions of the cult statues of the king in his mortuary temple³⁰. Similarly, the seated statue determinative of *Hnt-k3w.s* I, written each time after her name in the Abusir Papyri, represents the statue for which the cult activity being described was performed³¹. Support for interpreting the determinative as a depiction of the cult statue comes from a list of meat offerings in the Abusir Papyri³². *Hnt-k3w.s* and a number of officials are listed by name with the type and amount of the meat offerings listed below. Only after the name of the queen is the determinative used, as only she would have a statue within the royal establishment³³.

This type of elaborate determinative is also found after the name of Queen *ʿnh-n.s-Mry-Rʿ* I and her daughter *Nt*³⁴. Both determinatives are identical, showing the queens with vulture headdress, holding a *w3s* -scepter in one hand and an *ʿnh*-symbol in the other. The text in which these determinatives occur is concerned with the *hwt-ntr nt mwt-nsu (i)ptn(i)*, „the temple of these two kings' mothers“, so the determinatives could represent statues in that temple.

The wearing of a vulture cap by the queen-mother might well be tied to her title *s3t-ntr* which indicated that she was the daughter of the deceased king. As the daughter of a god

²⁶ Hassan, Giza IV, fig. 2.

²⁷ Verner, op.cit., 80.

²⁸ Goedicke, op.cit., fig. 4.

²⁹ See H.G. Fischer, The Orientation of Hieroglyphs, Egyptian Studies 2, 1977, fig. 58.

³⁰ P. Posener-Kriéger/J.L. de Cénival, Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Fifth Series, 1968, pl. IV, col. h, and pl. V, col. f; P. Posener-Kriéger, Les Archives du Temple Funéraire de Neferirkare-Kakai, BdE 65/1, 1976, 55.

³¹ P. Kaplony, in: Or 41, 1972, 60.

³² Posener-Kriéger/de Cénival, op.cit., pl. LXV. The drawing on a more recently found papyrus fragment from Abusir might also represent a statue of *Hnt-k3w.s* I, see M. Verner, in: RdE 31, 1979, 99.

³³ Kaplony, loc.cit., and 76.

³⁴ Jéquier, Pyramides des reines Neit et Apouit, 5. Urk. I, 279, line 15, mistakenly puts a sun disk and horns on each queen instead of the vulture cap.

perhaps she could take on the vulture headdress, the attribute of a goddess³⁵, to show her status. The fact that the vulture was also considered to be a symbol of maternity³⁶ bolsters this association.

³⁵ Goddesses depicted in Old Kingdom relief are almost always shown wearing the vulture headdress, for examples, see A. Labrousse et al., *Le Temple Haut du Complexe Funéraire du Roi Ounas*, 1977, 81, fig. 51; Lauer/Leclant, *op.cit.*, 65, fig. 23; Jéquier, *Pepi II*, II, 41. Also see H. Sourouzian, *Une tête de la reine Touy à Gourna*, in: *MDAIK* 37, 1981, 447, n. 9 and 10.

³⁶ G. Posener, *Dictionary of Egyptian Civilization*, 1959, 236.