THE STELA OF ḪEḴA-YEB
TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY HANS JAKOB POLOTSKY

With Plate xxix.

The funerary stela No. 1671 of the British Museum, published on Pl. xxix for the first time, is of that characteristic type which enables us at once to confine its date to the First Intermediate Period before the Eleventh Dynasty, and its provenance to Upper Egypt. Its inscription, which is the main subject of the present paper, has been styled "difficult and interesting" by Dr. Gardiner, which verdict will, I hope, excuse the marks of interrogation abounding in my translation, and justify the length of the philological notes added.

Through the kindness of Dr. Gardiner I was able to use this inscription for my little volume Zu den Inschriften der 11. Dynastie; I wish to offer him my thanks here for his generosity in leaving the publication to me, and to Dr. Hall for his consent thereto.

TRANSLATION.

The small numbers refer to the notes which follow.

(1) May the King be gracious and grant, (and also) Anubis, he on his mountain, imi-wt, the Lord of the Sacred Land, that an offering be given by the Great God, the Lord of Heaven, to the honoured one, the Sole Companion Heka-yeb; he says:

I was a good citizen speaking (2) with his mouth and acting with his arm, who makes his town keep at a distance from him. I was a noble one in Thebes, a great pillar in Khenteyet. I surpassed every peer of mine in this city in respect of riches of every kind. People (3) said, when I was making acquisitions by my (own) arm: "[he is] one that is free from robbing another." I provided (4) this whole city with Upper Egyptian barley for many (?) years, not to speak of the ... I gave bread to the hungry and (5) clothes to the naked. I did not calumniate great ones; I gave ease to little ones. (6) I gave a loan of corn (?) to Upper Egypt and Upper Egyptian barley to this northern district. I gave oil to the nome of El-Kāb after (7) my town had been satisfied. I made a ship of 40 (cubits) and (?) a bark, for transporting cattle and for ferrying him who had no boat in the season of inundation. I appointed (8) a herdsman to (my) 200 (?) head (.) of (?) cattle and (further) herdsmen to (my) goats and to (my) asses. My people were more numerous (9) and my ... were greater in number than those of any peer of mine. I was a (real) Hk'-ib (i.e., one mastering his heart) with respect to going forth in dangerous situations, while everybody else was shutting his door. (10) When the ruler counted my cattle, he found

---

1 It will also appear in the new edition of the Guide to the Egyptian Collections of the British Museum.
2 Otherwise there is no information as to its provenance; it was bought for the Museum some years ago, Dr. Hall tells me.
3 Letters to the Dead, 16.
4 Vol. xi of Sethe's Untersuchungen, Leipzig, 1929; referred to as Inschriften.
5 See Pl. xxix, and, for ll. 3-12, the facsimile on p. 195.
that my possessions had increased. As for everyone that had to deal\(^22\)(?) (11) with me, I caused him to bend his arm(?)\(^22\). I have gone forth from my house and descended into my tomb\(^22\), my house being established\(^24\) (12) and my heir’s arm being strong\(^28\).

What has been performed for him by his eldest son, his beloved\(^26\), Ini, the establisher of his father’s house.

NOTES.

1. *nds ikr, dd m rt f, tr m hps f*, see *Inscriften*, §§ 59 and 73 f.
2. *hsf cc. r*, cf. *One who keeps away a man’s son from his bedstead (?)*, *Letters to the Dead*, i, 4.
4. Cf. *I surpassed every peer of mine that had been holding office in this house*, Cairo 20543, 19.
5. Cf. Inschriften, § 73d, where this passage is quoted, together with several others, to illustrate the idiom \( \text{iri m hpS-} \) (gs-) “to acquire (honestly) by one’s own arm” as contrasted with inheritance (Urk., i, 144; Brit. Mus. 16281), royal gifts (Brit. Mus. 1164), or robbing others. For the sign following \( \Bar{y} \) I still adopt the reading \( \Bar{8} \) suggested by Lange and Schäfer for a likewise obscure sign of somewhat similar shape appearing in practically the same context in Cairo 20001b, 9. This reading, far though it is from being satisfactory in palaeographical respects, admits at least of a reasonable translation. One might, it is true, rather expect a sentence with \( pw \) (Gardiner, Eg. Gramm., § 128), the presence of which would, at any rate, put Lange and Schäfer’s interpretation almost beyond doubt. Examples may, however, be quoted of \( pw \) being absent in sentences of exactly the same character as the present one, viz. such medical diagnoses as “Thou shalt say: ‘One suffering from an abscess on his neck,’” Ebers, 51, 22.

6. For \( dJt \), cf. Petrie, Qurneh, Pl. 10, 3, where \( \Bar{r} \) says: \( \Bar{8} \) \( \Bar{8} \) \( \Bar{8} \) “I provided (with corn?) the temple of Amun in hard years.” The determinatives \( \Bar{8} \) and \( \Bar{8} \) respectively may be quite legitimate; the metaphor would have a parallel in the German \textit{durchbringen}, “to nourish under, and in spite of, difficult circumstances.” Such idioms as \( dJt \) \( \text{irI} \) “to suckle” are to be explained in a different way, see Vogelsang, Kommentar, 228.

7. The purport of \( \Bar{r} \) is obscure to me. It occurs again in the following passage: \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) “I spent a long time there (scil. in Denderah), a great number of years...,” Cairo 20543, 12. It seems tempting to refer \( \Bar{r} \) to the town, but I cannot make sense of it.

8. The three strokes in \( \Bar{r} \) are probably the plural-strokes, in spite of their irregular arrangement. No such word appears to be known, nor is it in any way clear to what kind of benefits it refers.


10. \( skbh \) is a rare word\(^3\) and by no means an easy one to translate; cf. “Phiops finds Kbhwt approaching him with those four water-jars of hers, \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) by which she refreshes the heart of the Great God on his day of awakening,” Pyr. 1180d; sim. 1181a, “I am one wealthy amidst his city, a great one, a lord of possessions, beloved of his city; \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) \( \Bar{r} \) living in easy circumstances in every respect,” Cairo 20007, 5–6. Professor Kees draws my attention also to his \textit{Opfertanz}, 53.

11. \( tJt \), see now Gardiner-Sethe, \textit{Letters to the Dead}, ii, 5 n. (p. 18). Their new rendering “loan (of corn)” is perhaps supported by the determinative \( \Bar{r} \) of our inscription, while, on the other hand, “(some sort of) corn” would seem to be more appropriate for parallelism with “Upper Egyptian barley”; see next note, end.

12. The interpretation of this sentence depends on the two groups which I have read \( \text{smr} \) “Upper Egypt”\(^4\) and \( \text{r} \) “district” respectively; and it is owing to these two words that my rendering differs so widely from that given by Gardiner-Sethe, \textit{Letters to the Dead}, ii, 5 n. (p. 18). For \( \text{smr} \) “Upper Egypt” written with the three grains, \textit{e.g.}
THE STELA OF ḤEKA-YEB

This misuse may have originated in the sportive arrangement, found in our inscription, of the grains in the word for "Upper Egyptian barley," making them appear to drop from the hanging top of the plant; eventually they may have come to be regarded as an integral part of the hieroglyph snmr. It certainly does not speak in favour of Gardiner-Sethe's reading ṣsp-n(-i)—for which I propose ḫ pn—that they were unable to make sense of ṣ. The thing placed upon the hand in ṣ is, in my opinion, the stroke indispensable with the word which I believe we have here.

Turning now to the sentence as a whole, nobody will fail to observe that the sense thus obtained is not altogether satisfactory. More serious still than the incongruity of ṭbt and ṣmr—corn—provided that Gardiner-Sethe's explanation be accepted—is that the scene of the deceased’s activity (pn “this...here”), which cannot by any means be doubted to have been Thebes or its neighbourhood, should be termed ḫ mḥṭi “northern district” (an expression sometimes used in the sense of “Lower Egypt”), in contrast with ṣmr “Upper Egypt.” I am much inclined to think that no reconciliation with normal geographical terminology must be attempted, but that reality has fallen a victim to the exigencies of style, i.e., to the need for parallelism. The fact that Thebes is more northerly than, e.g., El-Kâb (cf. l. 6), is, of course, no reason for excluding it from ṣmr “Upper Egypt.”

13. Cf. I 2 6 15 6 1 2, 6 I 6 “I gave Upper Egyptian barley to Hermonthis and to Asphynis after Gebelen had been fed,” Cairo 20001b, 6. ṣ stands for htp-t(t).

14. “Having made a ship of x cubits” is one of the commonplaces in the autobiographical inscriptions of this period. The following examples show three different degrees of fullness in indicating the number of cubits: (1) I 2 6 15 6 1 2, Ann. Serv., xv, 207 = Comptes rendus Acad. Inscr., 1915, 369, l. 2; (2) I 2 6 15 6 1 2, Amer. Journ. Sem. Lang. Lit., xxxviii, 56, 9; (3) I 2 6 15 6 1 2 “I made a ship (of) 30 (cubits) and another ship (of) 30 (cubits).” Cairo 20001b, 5–6. The absence of an indication of measure after dpt might perhaps suggest that we should take it in apposition to ṣ.

15. To introduce a new word of suspicious appearance into the vocabulary, ḫ “to transport (cattle) across the river,” seems unavoidable.

16. The precise meaning of ḫḥt5 is difficult to catch, cf. I 2 6 15 6 1 2, Ann. Serv., xv, 207, l. 4; also Cairo 20001b, 4, where, however, the meaning must be different, although the context is similar.

17. A numeral would be appropriate in this place although there is none after ṣḥḫt(-i) and ṣw(-i). The sign resembles rather the hieratic form for ṣ than the hieroglyph ṣ;

1 So arranged in horizontal line (kindly collated by Dr. Schott).
2 Professor Sethe, with whom I had the good fortune to be able to discuss the text after this article had been sent off, suggests an explanation of this difficult passage conveying a practically satisfactory sense. The words ṣmr — ḫ pn mḥṭi he would take not as a parallel member to ṭbt n ṣmr, but as an apposition to ṭbt, reading — as n(i): “I gave a loan of corn to Upper Egypt, (consisting of) Upper Egyptian barley from this northern district.”
3 Not ḫ ḫp, as was read by Gardiner, Eg. Gramm., § 327.
4 Read ṣḥḥt.
5 The feather on the breast of the bird is developed in a sportive manner, so as to resemble the phonetic complement ṣ; cf. also Cairo 20001 b, 2.
for the plural used with numerals see Gardiner, *Eg. Gramm.*, § 261, paragraph 2. As an alternative, one might imagine it to be another word for “herdsman,” but a more definite suggestion can scarcely be offered; moreover, the same word is actually used thrice in the following passage: “I placed a herdsman behind my cattle, a herdsman behind my goats, and a herdsman [behind my asses],” Petrie, *Qurneh*, Pl. 10, 4–5.

18. I cannot offer any explanation of this sign.

19. A play upon the deceased’s name; *hk-r-ib*, though not uncommon as a proper name, does not appear to occur as an epithet elsewhere.

20. As for *pr yt*, the antithetical parallel clause “while everybody else was shutting his door” forbids, I believe, our going far beyond the primary meaning of the stem *pr1* “to go forth”; and *", which seems to do duty for a determinative, recalls the hieratic sign usually transcribed "", appearing as such with certain words of evil meaning in some texts of the First Intermediate Period and the Early Middle Kingdom, cf. Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub*, 31; Gardiner-Sethe, *Letters to the Dead*, III, 3 n. (p. 19); so one may provisionally venture the somewhat vague and periphrastic rendering given above.

21. Rather the nomarch than the king.

22 (bis). My rendering of *msbb* is a mere guess; for better ascertained meanings of the stem see *Wb. d. aeg. Spr.*, II, 143. I have tentatively taken *k(r)h* as meaning a gesture of reverence.

23. See *Inschriften*, § 47.

24. The expressions in which *pr* appears as (semantic) object of *grg²* may be divided into three groups. (1) *The householder, on his decease, leaves his house established*, cf. “Neha has come from his city, Neha has descended from his nome, his house being established and his seat being firm,” Chassinat-Gauthier-Pieron, *Fouilles de Qattah*, 44; similarly *ibid.*, 45; “I have descended into the Beautiful West, my house being established,” *El Bersheh*, II, Pl. xxi, below, 4–5; the following example is interesting for its developed wording, “I made a testament for my son exceeding that which my father had made, my house being established on its foundation, my field being in its place, there not being anything of it that had gone astray, all my possessions being in their proper place,” Leyden V. 88, 11–2; epithet of the deceased, Berlin Pap. 10482 (Early M. K.), ap. Grapow, *Sitzungsber. Berl. Akad.*, 1915, 379. (2) *The son, having entered into his inheritance, establishes his father’s house*, cf. “May thy son establish thy house as thou hast established the house of thy father,” *Letters to the Dead*, I, 12; “The house of my father, I filled it with riches,” *Amer. Journ. Sem. Lang. Lit.*, xxxvIII, 56, 1. 8; perhaps *grg* means here rather “to keep established” or “to establish anew.” (3) *To establish an independent household, for*
THE STELA OF HEKA-YEB

which Prisse, 10, 8 (in connexion with marriage) and Urk., iv, 3, 2¹ (in contrast with youth and unmarried life) are well-known instances.

25. Having grown “strong of arm,” i.e., adult to a certain degree², is the quality by which an heir is enabled to enter into his inheritance and to fulfil the duties connected therewith; cf. “The nomarch’s mother held the regentship until her son had become a strong-armed one,” Siút, 5, 29; “I buried my father and furnished his tomb as must be done by a good heir beloved of his father, who buries his father, his arm having grown strong,” Petrie, Athribis, Pl. 6 (Late O.K.), end; this passage has been translated in a slightly different way by Sethe, A.Z., lxi, 69, n. 4.

26. This is the concluding formula of some contemporary inscriptions, e.g., Amer. Journ. Sem. Lang. Lit., xxxviii, 56; Cairo 20001; in Brit. Mus. 1059 (collated with photograph) the phrase is excluded from the main inscription and written above the deceased’s son presenting a cup to his father.

The deceased is accompanied by his beloved wife, Sole Favourite of the King, Priestess of Hathor, Senet and his beloved son Yeker. The steward Ren-yeker presents to him a cup, saying: “For the ka of my lord Ḥeka-yeb, the excellent one”; another man presents the leg of an ox, but the inscription referring to him is illegible. References for the proper names will be found in Lange-Schäfer’s Index.

¹ Without a suffix after pr.

² Whether this degree was connected with a definite age, or differed in individual cases, is not to be ascertained, so far as I am aware.

³ The papyrus-roll may indeed be intended to indicate a less concrete sense of the term.

⁴ Perhaps “for thy ka,” if ly may be read.