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A Unique Composite Hieroglyph

HENRY GEORGE FISCHER

I have long been intrigued by the playful ingenuity the ancient Egyptian scribes displayed, throughout their long history, in devising hieroglyphic composites. As a rule such inventions combine an ideogram and a phonetic sign, as in Old Kingdom ṣḥ, in which a man embodies the word for "carry" by carrying the first sign of the verb ṣḥ.1 In the Archaic Period hieroglyphs might also be combined in the writing of names consisting of a pair of elements: e.g., ḫsr-kḥꜣ (fig. 1a),2 and much later, from the New Kingdom onward, two or more signs were grouped in the hands and on the head of a human figure.3 This type of composite, although not yet attested for Old Kingdom names, was applied in that period to at least two occupational designations: ḫnḥmt "servant" and ḫst, "weaver" (fig. 1b, c).4 In the case under discussion, which does in fact concern the naming of a person, a human figure is again involved, but here the elements of the composition are wholly ideographic, and the ideogram is accompanied by a pair of phonetic signs (fig. 2). Thus this composite is evidently unique in both form and function, and one that has thus far resisted explanation.5

The group of signs in question appears on the lintel and drum of a woman, now in the Field Museum at Chicago (fig. 3),6 which have proven to come from Giza tomb 2033. The provenance may be seen from another lintel and drum (in one piece), which surmounted the southernmost niche of that mastaba, and which are now in the University Museum, Philadelphia (fig. 4).7 Every detail of the offering formula is similar in both cases, including the rather unusual omission of ḫḥw ḫw ḫnswt before the invocation of Anubis,8 and more particularly the form of ṣḥ, with four or five pellets beneath it instead of three, all of them oddly adhering to the strip of land above them.9 Also the exceptional configuration of the signs in ḫḥw, in which ḫ is more usually mounted upon ṣḥ.10 The same individuals are represented in an offering scene, now in the Cairo Museum, that has been assembled from a great many fragments,11 but these fragments

1 MM 12 (1977), 9, n. 42 and fig. 4a.
2 Ibid. 6-7, n. 14 and fig. 1c.
5 Ranke, FN I, 427 (4), reads ḫt with a query. Peter Kaplony, Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit I, p. 605, referring to his fig. 879, reads ḫḥmt. In the new edition of my Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom and the Heracleopolitan Period2, p. 74 and n. 285, I prefer to read ḫḥw. While this last suggestion is equally incorrect, it has finally led me to the solution proposed here.
6 Field Museum, Chicago, 31301, 31296. The length of the lintel is 57 cm. By permission of the Field Museum’s Department of Anthropology and, for the photograph, the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.
7 University Museum E 13533, length 55 cm.: Clarence Fisher, Minor Cemetery at Giza, pp. 115, 147-48, pls. 18, 51 (2); the adjacent niche contained another lintel and drum of smaller scale, E 13534-5, length 29 cm. I am indebted to Peter Manuelian for the reproduction of Fisher’s plate 51.
8 See Fisher, Egyptian Studies I, p. 24, n. 1, to which may be added Simpson Mastabas of Kawab, Khafrkhufr I, II, figs. 24-25 (but not 31-32); Dunham and Simpson, Mastaba of Queen Meryankh, fig. 6 (but not figs. 3, 7, 10); Leclant, Orientalia 22 (1953), 94, pl. 17(2): Ahmed Moussa, MDIAK 28 (1972), 289. Most of the evidence is early (i.e., Dyn. IV).
9 Four pellets are attested in at least two other cases, but the pellets are separated from ḫḥw in Hassan, Giza I, fig. 144; IV, fig. 108. The pellets are frequently omitted in inscriptions of Dyns. IV-V.
10 For variants of this combination of signs see MM 12 (1977), p. 9, fig. 5 and n. 38, esp. g (from James, Hieroglyphic Texts IV, pl. 3), a Dyn. IV example with 4 above ḫḥw, as also another of the same period: CG 1790 (Grébaut, Le Musée Égyptien I, pl. 21).
11 Cairo J.E. 60544; see Málek, PM III, p. 97.
Fig. 1. (a) composite name; (b–c) occupational composites.

Fig. 2. Ideographic composite.

Fig. 3. Lintel and drum in Field Museum, Chicago.

Fig. 4. Lintel and drum of S3b.f, University Museum, Philadelphia.
are more clearly and completely to be seen in a field photograph from Reisner's excavations. They include pieces of a larger architrave, about 80 cm. long, as well as a small portion of yet another architrave, both of which again name the woman. Although her name is damaged in all three cases where it appears on the fragments, it is clear that the writing is always identical to that of the more intact lintel and drum.

The dominant feature of the ideogram that terminates the name is a gazelle-headed clapper (or, more probably, a pair of clappers) like those brandished by dancers in a scene at Deshasha (fig. 5). Although this scene provides the only other Old Kingdom evidence for it, the gazelle-headed form must have been favored throughout pharaonic history, for an actual pair of such clappers, made of ivory, were found in a First Dynasty burial at Gaza (fig. 6), and they reappear in the hands of dancers and singers on blocks from the Twenty-second Dynasty temple at Bubastis (fig. 7). In a second Old Kingdom tomb chapel, at Giza, a row of female dancers shake the sistrum, another percussion instrument that served to emphasize the rhythm of the dance, and they hold clappers as well (fig. 5b).

The unmistakable presence of a clapper indicates that the name might be read Ḥnwt "percussionist." A determinative representing a percussionist occasionally appears in writings of that name, although the clappers are simplified.

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12 The Cairo Museum’s Journal d’Entrée has led me to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where Peter Der Manuelian kindly tracked down the field Photograph (A 7080). I have subsequently learned that it will eventually be published by Edward Brouwsiki.
13 Petrie, Deshasheh, pl. 12.
14 Petrie, Gizeh and Rifeh, pl. 5 (6–7); cf. the ram-headed clapper in his Tombs of the Courtiers, pl. 8 (21). There are also some less distinctive animal-headed clappers of the same period: Klasean, OMRO 39 (1958), 47ff., figs. 18, 21, and pls. 23 (3), 26 (1): Zaki Saad, ASAE 41 (1941), 407, and pl. 38 (from Helwan): Cairo J.E. 53110, 53111 (from Tura).
15 Naville, Festival Hall of Osorkon II, pls. 14 (dancers) and 25 (singers).
16 Junker, Giza X, figs. 44, 46. The sistrum also appears in Davies, Sheikh Said, pl. 4.
as indeterminate shapes (fig. 8a–b), and are sometimes replaced by a sistrum. The same is true of examples of $\text{hnwl/}	ext{hnwt}$ as a title (fig. 8c). In all such cases, however, the figure is standing rather than seated, and none of the numerous representations of singers and dancers show the woman’s hair tied back, with the ends of the binding falling behind the neck.

The last feature (in fig. 2 partly restored from the unpublished fragments) is peculiar to the seated figure that almost invariably appears in the name $\text{Hnmt}$ (fig. 9). It represents a female baker holding a pair of crossed sticks that were used to remove bread moulds from the fire. Incongruous as it may seem, the replacement of the crossed sticks by a pair of clappers is nonetheless felicitous, for the verb $\text{m'h}$ “clap” shows $\Rightarrow$ as an alternative to $\Rightarrow$, a pair of hands clap-
A UNIQUE COMPOSITE HIEROGLYPH

Fig. 9. Ideograph in name Hnmt.

ping 22 In the sole example of m3ht as a title, the sign  is replaced by a much more detailed determinative showing a crossed pair of curved clappers (fig. 10). 23

Thus the composite hieroglyph shown in fig. 2 combines elements that are appropriate to both Hnmt and Hnwt. And this combination explains the oddly abbreviated phonetic component, which admits either reading, and is otherwise difficult to account for. It cannot be regarded as a haphazard variant, since it occurs consistently and repeatedly in the writing of the woman's name, five times in all, and is unknown elsewhere. 24 Thus one is forced to conclude that the woman in fact had both names, and that the intention was to express both simultaneously. It is not uncommon to find two names assigned to the same person in the Old Kingdom, 25 and two other women named Hnwt are in fact known to have another name as well—Nfr-M3't in one case, 26 Intî in the other. 27

In view of the many playful devices employed by the scribes of the Old Kingdom, 28 the possibilities offered by the present conjunction of names evidently presented an opportunity for scribal ingenuity that was irresistible. And one not likely to be encountered again, for ideographic determinatives are not particularly common in the writing of personal names, and it is difficult to imagine another case where two such names both begin and end with the same consonants, and where the ideograms lend themselves

pl. 113–14, and Simpson, Mastabas of Qar and Idu, fig. 38. The scenes of daily life in tomb chapels also show men beating crossed sticks while driving a herd of donkeys treadling grain: Anne Macy Roth, Cemetery of Palace Attendants, pl. 183; Weeks, Mastabas of Cemetery G 6000, fig. 9 (where the scene is unfinished, perhaps because there was too little room for the donkeys). In another case only two of the men strike sticks: Simpson, Offering Chapel of Kayemnofret, fig. F. And in Simpson, Mastabas of Qar and Idu, fig. 24, two embalmers similarly strike a pair of sticks to mark the pace of a funeral procession. 22 Fischer, Egyptian Studies III, pp. 183–85.

23 From Fischer, Dendera, p. 24, fig. 5.

24 Ranke, PN 1, 427 (16), has Hût, but this is undoubtedly an incomplete occurrence of Nût, for the adjacent area is damaged: see Simpson, Mastabas of Qar and Idu, fig. 27, perhaps the same person as the Nût in fig. 19 (D). The Hût ascribed to Louvre C285 (PN 1, 274[14]) is likewise invalid; see Ziegler, Stèles . . . de l'Ancien Empire, no. 24. And the Hût-R of Hassan, Giza IX, p. 55, is also unlikely; from his pl. 22 A, this seems to be = hût-R, i.e., Hu-R, arranged exactly as in Martin, Tomb of Hetepka, pl. 33 (86).

25 Ranke, PN II, p. 7.

26 Reisner's G 1302, seen in the archives of the Museum of Fine Arts.

27 Fisher, Minor Cemetery, pl. 55.

28 In addition to composite hieroglyphs, these include playful allusions to names (ZAS 105 [1978], 42–44) and enigmatic inscriptions: (1) Cairo CG 1690; Weill, Le Champ des roseaux, pp. 1ff., and Drioton, Mélanges Maspero I, 697–704; (2) Giza Tomb 2191: ZAS 105, (1978), 56–57. The revision of the latter that is proposed by Ludwig Morenz, JEA 84 (1998), 195–96, is untenable, but this must be discussed elsewhere.
to being combined as a graphic pun that is readily recognizable.

One further point should be made about the mastaba of Sḥḥf and HnwtHrmt, namely that it can hardly be as late as the Sixth Dynasty, as has previously been stated. Inscriptions in true relief—and in relief of such quality—would be unexpected on the lintel and drum of any offering niche of so late a date, and the fragmentary offering scene confirms this impression. Here the detail of the man’s wig suggests the Fifth Dynasty,30 while his long robe looks even earlier,31 and so too the multiple bracelets of the woman.32 It is unlikely that these two features reappeared very much later than the Fourth Dynasty, and at least one other mastaba in Fischer’s concession also seems to be as early as the Fifth.33

Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York

32 Ibid., p. 70. Cf. also the comment on the offering formula in note 8 above.
33 Fisher’s G3008, which Reisner, Giza Necropolis I, p. 312, in fact includes among mastabas of that Dynasty. Cherpion, op. cit., p. 235, implausibly dates this to the reign of Sneferu. Here, as elsewhere, she puts far too much weight on the mention of a royal name; so too, for example, in the case of Mnty (pp. 231, 233, 235), whose tomb at Dendera does not date to the reign of Merenre, but is actually later than the Old Kingdom; see Fischer, Dendera, pp. 83–91, 170.