

SENEBKAY, BLOCK R 11, AN ALTERNATIVE READING.

WITH A NOTE ON BARE INITIAL *tw* AND PRE-NEW KINGDOM INSTANCES OF THE LATE EGYPTIAN SUBJECT PRONOUN *twi*, *twk*, *sw*...

In the preceding issue of this journal, Kevin Cahail published a short and fascinating inscription on a limestone block re-used in the tomb chamber of the Second Intermediate Period Abydene king Senebkay.¹ The block, R 11, is one of several that once belonged to the dismantled funerary chapel of an earlier official, Ibiau, son of Dedtu, dating to the Thirteenth Dynasty. Its lower register includes a caption to an image of two oxen plowing (extending over to the adjacent block R 3). The editor of the inscription transcribes and transliterates as:

tw(=j) (𓂏𓂐) hr hrp jh.w
tw(=j) hr jn.t dr.w t(3) j3b.tj r 'k sw

“I am driving the oxen.

I am reaching the border of the eastern land in order to penetrate/cross it.”

The editor comments that this would represent a very early instance of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun *twi*, *twk*, *sw*..., and delineates a broader dialectal and socio-lectal scenario based on this finding.

An alternative reading

The proposed reading with the Late Egyptian subject pronoun *twi*, *twk*, *sw*... is problematic on two accounts. The first concerns the spelling, which the editor interprets as standing for “*tw(=j)*.” Barring specific periods (such as in the Old Kingdom and in early Demotic), the omission of the first person suffix is found mostly in contexts in which the grammatical person is predictable, not in an isolated segment of discourse such as here, in a caption; in the pronoun *twi*, *twk*... specifically, the omission of the first person formative *-i* is hardly attested elsewhere and would leave the written form as the bare base *tw-*. The second issue concerns genre. Reden und Rufe commonly include speech in the first person, but typically in (explicit or implicit) dialogue settings;² none is given here. Given these two mutually compounding issues, an alternative reading is sought.

Rather than being the verbatim of an (implicit) dialogue, the caption here parallels the image in a directly descriptive way. Such a caption would typically feature the labelling infinitive, which sets the perspective on the action as such, and generally leaves the agent unmentioned. Another construction that performs a broadly similar duty is the passive, as well as the related active impersonal construction. Early instances of active impersonal constructions in Reden und Rufe date to the time of Thutmosis III:

¹ K. Cahail, “The Earliest Attestation of the Late Egyptian *tw=j hr sdm* Construction in the Second Intermediate Period tomb of Seneb-Kay at South Abydos: Evidence of a Residence Sociolect?”, *RdE* 69 (2019), p. 15-34.

² Compare, notably, in W. Guglielmi, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf altägyptischen Darstellungen der Landwirtschaft, Viehzucht, des Fisch- und Vogelfangs vom Mittleren Reich bis zur Spätzeit* (TÄB 1), 1973; A. Erman, *Reden, Rufe und Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches* (AAWB, Phil.-hist. Kl. 15), 1919; A. Motte, *Les Reden und Rufe dans les tombes privées de l’Ancien Empire à la Basse Époque : édition et commentaire philologique*, PhD Université de Liège, 2018.

ḥr tw.tw ḥr ʒs=n m šmt

“And one is hurrying us in (our) going”

(*Paheri*, pl. 3, 2nd register from bottom, 2nd inscription from the right, 10-11)³

hrw nfr tw.tw kb...

“A good day: one is cool...”

(*Paheri*, pl. 3, 3rd register from top, central horizontal inscription)

In the early New Kingdom instances just quoted, the impersonal form of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun, *tw.tw*, is used. Ibiau’s block has a mere *tw*, that is, not an abbreviated *tw.tw*, but the impersonal *tw* itself⁴ – here in its bare initial form. Bare initial *tw* is uncommon and found only in two Middle Egyptian constructions:⁵

- the rare construction *tw r sdm*, expressing future tense like *ḥw.tw r sdm* (more broadly (X.)*tw r sdm*)—occurrences of *tw r sdm*: Neferti 6b, 7g-h, 8f, 10h, 15a; as a secondary reading in Teaching of Kheti 3.5-6 (mult. mss.), Hymn to the Inundation 6.4 (1 ms.); Neferti 10e (1 ms.), Ptahhotep 72 L2; and in a personal name documented in D.13-18;⁶
- the even rarer *tw sdm*, expressing progressive aspect like *ḥw.tw ḥr sdm* (more broadly (X.)*tw ḥr sdm*)—occurrences of *tw sdm*: Hymn to the Nileflood 6.3-4; Teaching of Kheti 3.5-6; Neferti 10e, 12b.⁷

The conditions licensing, or even triggering, the use of bare initial *tw* have been analyzed elsewhere.⁸ The points that are most directly relevant here are these. Leaving aside those instances of bare initial *tw* that are textually secondary, the other instances fall in two syntactic groups. In one group (Hymn 6.3-4; Teaching of Kheti 3.5-6), *tw sdm* is in the second member of a complex syntactic construction, the setting construction (a.k.a. Vernus’ “second schème” of the emphatic construction); this use need not concern us further here. The other group (all the Neferti instances) is directly relevant to the construction in Ibiau. In Neferti, the clauses with *tw sdm* and *tw r sdm* fall under the scope of the presentification of the anomic in the land, that Neferti, as he speaks, in vivid images, extends before the real and fictional audience.⁹ Thus, with progressive *tw sdm*:¹⁰

³ J. J. Tylor – F. Ll. Griffith. *The Tomb of Paheri at el-Kab (EEF Memoir 11)*, 1894.

⁴ On the rise of the impersonal *.tw* out of the inflectional marker of the passive {t} (*.t*, *.t(i)*, *.t(w)*), A. Stauder, *The Earlier Egyptian Passive: Voice and Perspective (LingAeg SM 14)*, 2014, p. 349-409.

⁵ Note that bare initial *tw* is unrelated to the *sw*-headed constructions (*sw sdm=f* and the like), for which see J. Roberson, “Observations on the so-called ‘*sw sdm=f*’, or Middle Egyptian proclitic pronoun construction,” in Z. Hawass – J. Wegner (eds.), *Millions of Jubilees: Studies in Honor of David P. Silverman*, II (*ASAE Suppl.* 39), 2010, p. 185-205, with references to the abundant previous literature; to which add, more recently, A. Stauder, *Linguistic Dating of Middle Egyptian Literary Texts (LingAeg SM 12)*, 2013, p. 331-335; D. Werning, “Linguistic Dating of the Netherworld Books Attested in the New Kingdom. A critical review,” in G. Moers et al. (eds.), *Dating Egyptian Literary Texts*, “Dating Egyptian Literary Texts” Göttingen, 9-12 June 2010 (*LingAeg SM 11*), 2013, p. 269-271.

⁶ A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 363-364; *Passive*, 358-360; for pre-Eighteenth Dynasty occurrences of (X.)*tw r sdm*, A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 368; for the *tw r sdm* as a construction, *ibid.*, p. 363-367, more broadly p. 358-376; *Passive*, p. 356-360.

⁷ A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 390-394; for *tw sdm* as a construction, *ibid.*, p. 376-390, more broadly p. 376-398; *Passive*, p. 363-365, more broadly p. 360-365.

⁸ For *tw r sdm*, A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 364-367; *Passive*, p. 358-360. For *tw sdm*, *Dating*, p. 389; *Passive*, p. 365.

⁹ A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 379-382.

¹⁰ For these two passages, both of which are generally read otherwise, A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 376-382.

$d=i n=k s3 m hrwy...$
tw nhm ht s r=f rdw n nty m rwtj

“I shall show you the son as an enemy...”

A man’s property is taken from him to be given to the one who is outside.”

(Neferti 9f...10e)

$d=i n=k t3 m sny-mny s3-‘ m nb ‘ tw nd-hrt nd-hrt d=i n=k...$

“I shall show you the land in calamity, the weak of hand now a lord of force, the one who did the greeting being greeted. I shall show you...”

(Neferti 12a-c)

Regarding the personal name, its sentential content is, by definition, unrelated to any surrounding linguistic context:

tw(-r)-mrt=s

“She-will-be-loved (and possibly also, for the forms without *r*: She-is-loved)¹¹”

In slightly more linguistic terms, both environments, in Neferti and in the personal name, are described as “thetic.”¹² Unlike a categorial statement, consisting of given and new information and developing a preceding linguistic context, a thetic statement presents the event as a whole, “en bloc” (e.g., “it rains,” “there is a man running”). The desolate images that Neferti presents to his audience are thetic; so is a personal name, in the lack of any linguistic context that it could elaborate. In captions, the common “labelling infinitive” also has a thetic-like effect: it sets the perspective on the event as such, rather than relating it to any surrounding linguistic context. On Ibiau’s block, a caption labels an image like an infinitive would more commonly do. The environment is thetic, licensing the bare initial *tw*, just like in Neferti’s lament, consisting of images that are vividly extended before the audiences. The construction on Ibiau’s block, *tw hr sdm*, is the non-literary variant to the literary *tw sdm* as in Hymn 6.3-4, Kheti 3.5-6, and Neferti 10e, 12b. The following reading of the caption on Ibiau’s block can then be proposed:

tw hr hrp ihw tw hr int...

“One is driving the oxen. One is reaching...”

¹¹ References gathered by P. Vernus, *Future at Issue. Tense, Mood and Aspect in Middle Egyptian: Studies in Syntax and Semantics* (YES 4), 1990, p. 7, n. 16: (i) Alwyn Castle 1950 *tw-r-mrt=s* (P. Vernus, *Future*, p. 7, ex. 9; early D.13); (ii) CGC 20695a *tw-mrt=s*, *tw mr.tw^{sic}=s* (H. Lange – H. Schäfer, *Grab- und Denksteine des Mittleren Reichs im Museum von Kairo, No. 20001-20780. II: Text zu No. 20400-20780*, 1908, p. 322-322; H. Ranke, *PN I*, 1935, 379.3; D.13, cf. www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/8ste250.pdf); (iii) *i’h-ms tw-(m)r=s* (P. Vernus, *Le surnom au Moyen Empire: répertoire, procédés d’expression et structures de la double identité du début de la XII^e dynastie à la fin de la XVII^e dynastie* (StudPohl 13), 1986, p. 88 and n. 44; M. Gitton, *Les divines épouses de la 18^e dynastie* (Annales Littéraires de l’Université de Besançon 306), 1984, p. 16-17, n. 37; early D.18).

¹² For thetic statements, K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents* (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 71), 1994, p. 137-146; H.-J. Sasse, “The thetic/categorial distinction revisited,” *Linguistics* 25 (1987), p. 511-580.

The inscription, therefore, does not provide a very early instance of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun *twi*, *twk*, *sw*... Nor does it, consequently, carry any implication for dialectal or socio-lectal scenarios. Its interest for language history lies elsewhere and is twofold at once:

- as the earliest securely dated instance of the construction (X.)*tw hr sdm*—alongside only one other securely pre-New Kingdom instance, in the literary Tale Involving the House of Life, P. BM EA 10475 vso X+5.2-4, dating to the (probably later) Second Intermediate Period;¹³
- and as the earliest securely dated instance of bare initial *tw*—alongside only one other securely pre-New Kingdom instance, in the personal name *tw(-r)-mrt=s* documented from the Thirteenth to Eighteenth Dynasty.

The funerary chapel of Ibiau, son of Dedtu, dates to the Thirteenth Dynasty, and *Reden und Rufe* are generally open to accommodating innovative expression relatively earlier than other types of texts or inscriptions.¹⁴ This is consistent with the hypothesis of a post-Twelfth Dynasty dating of Neferti, Kheti, and Hymn.¹⁵

An early instance of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun in CT VI 33d?

It has been proposed that CT VI 33d should be read as including the earliest instance of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun:¹⁶

nn twi (𓂏𓂏𓂏) *r wnm* [...] *n sf r ḥ3m n hrw pn*

“I shall not be for eating [...] yesterday or for fishing today”

(CT VI 33d SIC; translation Faulkner)

Assuming that the caption on Ibiau’s block also included a very early instance of such pronoun, two pre-Seventeenth Dynasty attestations would be given, reinforcing one another.¹⁷ As discussed, the caption on Ibiau’s block arguably reads differently, so that the alleged instance in CT VI 33d remains isolated. Another reading of CT VI 33d, in keeping with what is known otherwise of pre-Seventeenth Dynasty Middle Egyptian, is with a negative variant of the construction *nt-pw* “It is the case/fact that ...” (interrogative *in-ntt*, once *in-nt pw*, “Is it the case/fact that...?”):¹⁸

i wr n it=k wi n wnm=k wi
n nt-wi r wnm {[k]²w}¹ *n sf r ḥ3m n hrw pn...*

“O Great one, you have not seized me, you have not eaten me;

it is not the case that I am destined to the food... of yesterday, to the catch of today...”

¹³ *ir.in.tw ḥ'w r hrw 40 m ḥb nfr n* [...] *iw.tw hr swr m* [...] “And a period up to forty days was spent in a beautiful festival of/for [...] drinking from/in [...]”. Text: R. Parkinson, “Two New ‘Literary Texts’ on a Second Intermediate Period Papyrus? A preliminary account of P. BM EA 10475,” in J. Assmann – E. Blumenthal (eds.), *Literatur und Politik im pharaonischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten: Vorträge der Tagung zum Gedenken an Georges Posener 5.-10. September 1996 in Leipzig* (BdE 127), 1999, p. 190-193, 196.

¹⁴ E.g., P. Vernus, “Du moyen égyptien au néo-égyptien, de *m à m-jr*: l’auxiliation de l’impératif négatif à la XVIII^e dynastie,” in Z. Hawass – J. Wegner (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 315-335.

¹⁵ A. Stauder, *Dating*, p. 343-440, 475-483, and 217-240, respectively.

¹⁶ R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. Translated and Edited by R. O. Faulkner*, II, p. 118, n. 13 (“if this be correct, it must be the earliest recorded example of *tw.i*”).

¹⁷ Thus K. Cahail, *RdE* 69, p. 26.

¹⁸ On this construction, A. Gardiner, *EG*, §190.2, §494.1-3.

What CT 33d illustrates, then, is not the Late Egyptian subject pronoun, but the *source construction* that was posited in a previous paper for the interlocutive (*i.e.*, first and second) persons of that same pronoun: (X)-*ntt/nt wī*... > *twī*, (X)-*ntt=k* > *twk*, etc.¹⁹ From this source construction, the pronoun would eventually grammaticalize, at some later point in time. That such a grammaticalization had occurred is first attested in the Seventeenth Dynasty, in Antefnakht's stela BM EA 1645, 3, then in Kamose's Inscriptions (*passim*).²⁰

Résumé / Abstract

On propose que la légende sur un bloc de la treizième dynastie récemment publié (Cahail, *RdE* 69) présente, non pas une occurrence ancienne du pronom sujet néo-égyptien *twī*, *twk*, *sw*..., mais une instance de la construction *tw hr sdm*. Le bloc donne ainsi les plus anciennes attestations sûrement datées tout à la fois du *tw* initial et de la construction (X.)*tw hr sdm*. Les deux constructions participent d'innovations linguistiques de l'époque, pertinentes pour la question de la datation de certains textes littéraires moyen égyptiens. Quant aux premières attestations connues du pronom sujet néo-égyptien *twī*, *twk*, *sw*..., celles-ci ne sont pas antérieures à la dix-septième dynastie.

It is proposed that a recently published Thirteenth Dynasty caption on a block reused in Senebkay's tomb (Cahail, *RdE* 69) does not read with an early instance of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun *twī*, *twk*, *sw*..., but with a *tw hr sdm* construction. The block thus provides the earliest securely dated instances of, at once, bare initial *tw* and of (X.)*tw hr sdm*. Both constructions relate to broader linguistic innovations of the time and have relevance to dating Middle Egyptian literary texts. No known instance of the Late Egyptian subject pronoun *twī*, *twk*, *sw*... predates the Seventeenth Dynasty.

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¹⁹ A. Stauder, "L'origine du pronom sujet néo-égyptien (*twī*, *twk*, *sw*, etc.)," *RdE* 67 (2016), p. 145-146. In the third person similarly, the source construction is documented in early times, see A. Stauder, *ibid.*, p. 146-149.

²⁰ P. Vernus, "Réflexions et adaptations de l'idéologie monarchique à la 2^e Période Intermédiaire : la stèle d'Antef le Victorieux," in P. Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, II, 1996, p. 834, n. m; A. Stauder, *RdE* 67, p. 152-154; B. Kroeber, *Die Neuägyptizismen vor der Amarnazeit. Studien zur Entwicklung der ägyptischen Sprache vom Mittleren zum Neuen Reich*, 1970, p. 87-94.