

Rereading the 7th Count of Snefru in the Palermo Stone¹

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The Palermo Stone is among the largest and best preserved of the early royal annals fragments. It takes its name from the city of Palermo, Italy, where it now resides in the Museo Archeologico Regionale “Antonino Salinas.” Royal annals are critically important for our historical reconstructions of early Egyptian history as they list significant events for the year over the course of successive kings’ reigns.² Unfortunately, because of their fragmentary condition and cursory inscriptions, the royal annals have proven difficult to fully decipher, posing many challenges to the scholars working on them. One of these challenges can be found in the section of the Palermo Stone devoted to the 7th count³ in the reign of Snefru (fig. 1).⁴

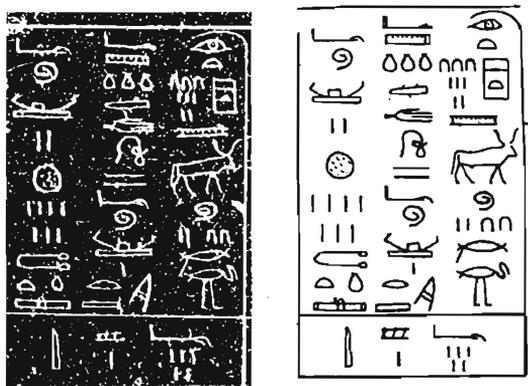


Fig. 1 – 7th Count of Snefru from Palermo Stone

[Photo and copy from: Heinrich Schäfer, *Ein Bruchstück altägyptischer Annalen* (Berlin: Verlag der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902), plate 1 and page 30]

The reading of the initial column of this entry from the Palermo Stone has proven especially difficult, leading to various interpretations about the meaning of this text.⁵ In its

¹ This brief note is the result of a problem introduced to me through conversations with Dr. Nadine Moeller.

² Toby Wilkinson, *Royal Annals of Ancient Egypt: The Palermo Stone and its Associated Fragments* (London: Kegan Paul, 2000), 20-21.

³ For a new interpretation of the Old Kingdom cattle counts, see John S. Nolan, “The Original Lunar Calendar and Cattle Counts in Old Kingdom Egypt,” in Susanne Bickel and Antonio Loprieno (eds.), *Basel Egyptology Prize I: Junior Research in Egyptian History, Archaeology, and Philology*, *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 17 (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG Verlag, 2003), 75-97.

⁴ Heinrich Schäfer, *Ein Bruchstück altägyptischer Annalen* (Berlin: Verlag der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902), 30, plate 1.

⁵ As noted by James Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt I: The First to the Seventeenth Dynasties* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1906), 66 n. b: “Some particular kind of building is meant.”

original publication, Heinrich Schäfer did not offer any suggestion.⁶ Jaromir Malek proposed an interesting solution to this passage, translating "... creating 35 estates with people and 122 cattle-farms."⁷ Malek's suggestion was followed by Toby Wilkinson in his edition of the royal annals, transliterating *hw.t-z(?) 35 š-k3 122*.⁸ While an ingenious suggestion, an "estate of man" (*hw.t-z*) is otherwise unknown and seems to make little sense in the context of the inscription.⁹ In addition, though paleography cannot provide any certain conclusions, the door-bolt *z* elsewhere in the Palermo Stone is written with multiple vertical strokes in the center.¹⁰ In the example under discussion there is only a single vertical stroke.

Because of these problems, an alternative solution can be suggested which has the benefit of being a known entity in the Old Kingdom and reducing the paleographic oddities,

although some uncertainties remain. Rather than reading  *hw.t-z* "estate of men/people,"

we should probably read  *hw.t-ʕ.t* "great estate."¹¹ Thus the entry in the Palermo Stone would refer to the "making of 35 great estates" (*ir.t hw.t-ʕ.t 35*).¹² The "great estate" is a commonly known unit of administration in the Old Kingdom¹³ and would be a logical addition in the context of the royal annals where similar events are mentioned.

However, several paleographic problems still remain. The two strokes making up the ʕ sign (Gardiner O29) in this text closely resemble hieratic writings of the ʕ sign, although the vertical stroke is usually, but not always, placed off-center in hieratic examples.¹⁴ In addition,

⁶ Schäfer, *Annalen*, 30: "Machen von 35 ---- 122 Rindern." Without transliteration, Schäfer's reading for "Rindern" is uncertain and his understanding may have been based solely on the bull-hieroglyph.

⁷ Jaromir Malek *In the Shadow of the Pyramids: Egypt during the Old Kingdom* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 68; Adopted by Mark Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 228 and Nigel Strudwick, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*, Writings from the Ancient World 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 66 and 79 n. 4.

⁸ Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 143.

⁹ Desislava Nikolova pointed out the uncertainty of this interpretation: "In the Annals the setting up of two other kinds of estates or structures is also mentioned whose meaning is not very clear" [Desislava Nikolova, "The Reign of Sneferu: Some Aspects of the Historical and Religious Development," *The Journal of Egyptological Studies* 1 (2004), 77 n. 99].

¹⁰ Cf. especially its appearance in PS r.V.9 in the writing of *snw.ty* (note interchange of *z* and *s*) and PS v.II.2 in the writing of *zt*: Schäfer, *Annalen*, 28, 34; Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 153. Unfortunately, *hw.t-ʕ.t* is not mentioned elsewhere in the preserved portions of the Palermo Stone and thus there is no basis of comparison within this text.

¹¹ Hesitantly suggested by Juan Carlos Moreno García, *Hwt et le milieu rural égyptien du IIIe millénaire: économie, administration et organisation territoriale* (Paris: H. Champion, 1999), 36-37 n. 91, but not incorporated into Strudwick, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*, 66.

¹² Although mentioned without comment nor identification of the interior signs, this meaning had already been recognized by Alessandro Roccati, *La littérature historique sous l'ancien empire égyptien* (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1982), 40 (translation "... fait 35 grandes demeures"), subsequently dismissed by Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 143: "Roccati's translation ["grandes demeures"] seems less plausible than the one offered here, given our current knowledge of early Old Kingdom elite culture and royal activities."

¹³ *Wb.* III, 3-4; Jochem Kahl, *Frühägyptisches Wörterbuch, Dritte Lieferung h-h* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 298; Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch*, 783.

¹⁴ See Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie: Die Aegyptische Buchschrift in ihrer Entwicklung von der fünften Dynastie bis zur römischen Kaiserzeit. Erster Band* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1909), 34 n. 363; Hans Goedicke, *Old Hieratic Paleography* (Baltimore: Halgo, 1988), 29a-b n. 29. Note how many of these examples could easily be mistaken for *z* because the vertical stroke is placed in the center of the horizontal stroke. A selection of hieratic examples can be found in P. Lacau and J.-Ph. Lauer, *La pyramide à degrés, Tome V: Inscriptions à l'échelle sur les vases* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1965).

hieratic¹⁵ and hieroglyphic¹⁶ writings agree that the normal placement of the ʕ sign extends beyond the edges of the *ḥw.t*-sign. To speculate on the reasons behind this particular grouping of signs in the Palermo Stone example, it is possible that the spatial arrangement of the text could have necessitated this adjustment, as the horizontal stroke of the ʕ sign would have extended towards the right, overlapping the *rnḫ.t* sign used to divide each entry in the annals. Alternatively, the inscriber of the stone may have simply chosen to follow the convention of placing the compound element inside of the enclosure as commonly done in many other *ḥw.t* compounds (e.g. *ḥw.t-nṯr*, *Ḥw.t-Ḥr*, *ḥw.t-wr.t*).

Despite the common appearance of the ʕ sign extending beyond the edges of the *ḥw.t* sign, examples are known in which the ʕ sign is entirely enclosed within the *ḥw.t* (fig. 2).¹⁷ These attestations are not exact paleographic parallels, having been carved in raised relief, but they do attest to the fact that the ʕ-sign can be entirely enclosed within the *ḥw.t*-sign. As these examples date from the third dynasty, it should not seem surprising to find a similar arrangement in the Palermo Stone.

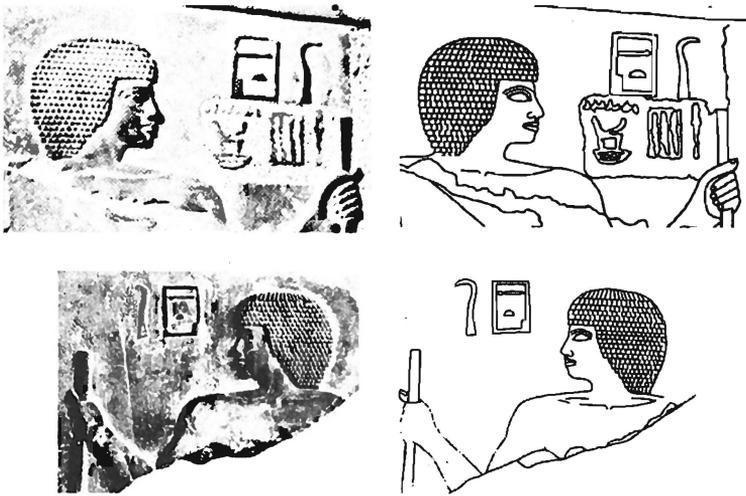


Fig. 2 – Louvre B1 and B2: 3rd Dynasty Inscriptions Mentioning *ḥw.t-ʕ.t*

[Photos and Copies: Christiane Ziegler, *Catalogue des stèles, peintures et reliefs égyptiens de l’Ancien Empire et de la Première Période Intermédiaire* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1990), 97, 99, 102-103]

¹⁵ Möller, *Paläographie*, 33 n. 346; Goedicke, *Paleography*, 28a-b n. 8.

¹⁶ For hieroglyphic examples, see the references cited in n. 10.

¹⁷ Christiane Ziegler, *Catalogue des stèles, peintures et reliefs égyptiens de l’Ancien Empire et de la Première Période Intermédiaire* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1990), in the text of number 14 (pages 96-100) and number 15 (pages 101-103). See also the citation in Jochem Kahl, *Das System der ägyptischen Hieroglyphenschrift in der 0.-3. Dynastie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 631.

Following *lr.t ḥw.t ʕ3.t 35* is another difficult group of signs. The transliteration *š-k3* is problematic. In the first place, a comparison of all the writings of *š* in the Palermo Stone agree that the top and bottom horizontal lines do not extend past the vertical strokes of the left and right edges (cf. e.g. the writing of *š* in the word *ʕ3* in column 2 of the text under discussion). In addition, its traditional sense of “pool/basin,” *š-k3* 122 “122 basins of cattle” makes little sense and even the extended meaning of “domain” offers little help.¹⁸ At first glance, this sign looks more like the *mr*-canal sign, perhaps suggesting a reading *mr(w)* 122 “bulls 122.”¹⁹ However, this would be the only known example of the word *mr* “bull” written with the *mr*-canal sign and the word itself is quite rare in the preserved textual record. Roccati’s translation “reçu 122 bêtes” implies the reading *šzp* (Gardiner O43).²⁰ Several other *šzp* signs are written in the Palermo Stone, one fragmentary example in PS v.I.2 which parallels the paleography of the example under discussion, and one example in the Nile measurement of PS v.I.2, which shows several differences.²¹ Overall, the form of the *šzp* sign here fits the general shape of the sign as it is found elsewhere, with important caveats.²² This is the simplest and most straightforward way to read this text and provides the most logical sense. Additionally, this interpretation places the “receiving of bulls” into the standard annalistic style of infinitive + noun, rather than grouping this together with *ḥw.t-ʕ3.t* in an uncertain relationship.²³ Taking these suggestions into account, the entry of Snefru’s 7th count would read as follows:

1	<i>lr.t ḥw.t-ʕ3.t 35 šzp k3 122 šd dšr</i>	1	Establishing 35 great estates, receiving 122 bulls, constructing
2	<i>ʕ3 dw3-ḫ.wy mh 100 l mr</i>	2	1 “praising the two lands” cedar boat of 100 cubits,
3	<i>mh 100 2 zp 7 ḫw.t</i>	3	2 <i>meru</i> -wood boats of 100 cubits. 7 th occasion of the count.
4	<i>mh 5 zšp l dbʕ</i>	4	5 cubits, 1 palm, 1 finger.

¹⁸ Translated as “agricultural holding” by Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 110, who cited Lehner, *Complete Pyramids*, 232. See the study of Rainer Stadelmann, “Die *ḥntjw-š*, der Königsbezirk *š n Pr-ʕ3* und die Namen der Grabanlagen der Frühzeit,” *BIFAO* 81 Supplément (1981), 153-164. This would also represented the only attestation of a *š-k3*.

¹⁹ For *mr*-bulls (“Kampfstier”), see *Wb.* II, 106; Rainer Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I: Altes Reich und Erste Zwischenzeit* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2003), 546. For the interchange of the *mr*-hoe and the *mr*-canal signs, cf. the writings in Jochem Kahl, *Frühägyptisches Wörterbuch, Zweite Lieferung m-h* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 186-187. The earliest examples of the relatively uncommon *mr* “bull” date to the 5th Dynasty Abusir papyri and occur in a broken context [Paule Posener-Krieger, *Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakaï* (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1976), 251]. Several examples are known from the Middle Kingdom inscriptions at Beni Hasan [*Wb. Belegstellen II*, 154; Rainer Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch II: Mittleres Reich und Zweite Zwischenzeit, Teil I* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006), 1102].

²⁰ Roccati, *La littérature historique*, 40.

²¹ The vertical strokes overlap the top horizontal stroke and the left side has an additional diagonal stroke.

²² Similar hieratic examples, although with fewer interior strokes, can be found in Lacau and Lauer, *La pyramide à degrés, Tome V*, 24-28 n. 36-38, pl. 19. In general, one would expect the vertical strokes to overlap the top horizontal stroke and fewer interior vertical strokes. These differences basically represent the variations between the sign forms Gardiner O42 and O43.

²³ While bulls could certainly be associated with great estates, there is little direct evidence from Old Kingdom texts where great estates often appear in titles and lists. The connection here has always seemed forced. The association of *ḥw.t-ʕ3.t* and cattle is mentioned by Juan Carlos Moreno Garcia, “Administration territoriale et organisation de l’espace en Egypte au troisième millénaire avant J.-C. (III-IV): *nwt mšwt et ḥwt-ʕ3t*,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 125 (1998), 46-47, 53 (citing specifically the Coffin Texts).

The function of the *ḥw.t-ʿ3.t* has been discussed by Juan Carlos Moreno García in great detail.²⁴ If his interpretations are correct about the function of this institution, mentioning the “making of 35 great estates”²⁵ would be a worthy endeavor to record in the Royal Annals as it implies a range of administrative processes which probably included the incorporation of further provincial territory into the direct oversight of palace officials (e.g. *ḥq3 ḥw.t-ʿ3.t*).²⁶ If this rereading is correct, it will be up to Old Kingdom historians to evaluate the implications of such an inscription for the reign of Snefru²⁷ and the administrative organization of Egypt in the 4th Dynasty.²⁸

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²⁴ García, “Administration territoriale,” 45-55; *idem.*, *Hwt et le milieu rural*, 36-39.

²⁵ The connection between these events and the campaign against Nubia mentioned in the previous Palermo Stone entry is hinted at by García, *Hwt et le milieu rural*, 36.

²⁶ For *ḥq3 ḥw.t-ʿ3.t*, see Dilwyn Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000), 671 and the index of various known great estates which follows on 672-678. Many of these estates are known from the 4th Dynasty inscription of Metjen (where the ʿ3-sign is often written inside the *ḥw.t*-sign), who, coincidentally, served under Snefru [*Urk.* I, 1-7; Karin Barbara Gödecken, *Eine Betrachtung der Inschriften des Meten im Rahmen der sozialen und rechtlichen Stellung von Privatleuten im ägyptischen Alten Reich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976)].

²⁷ Up until now, our uncertain reading of the events from Snefru’s 7th count has resulted in the ignoring of these records in the history books, even though scholars have often quoted many of the other events from Snefru’s reign mentioned in the Palermo Stone [Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 78; W. Stevenson Smith, “The Old Kingdom in Egypt and the Beginning of the First Intermediate Period,” in I. E. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd, and N. G. L. Hammond (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 1 Part 2 Early History of the Middle East*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 167; Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, translated by Ian Shaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 67-69; Aidan Dodson, *Monarchs of the Nile* (London: Rubicon Press, 1995), 26-29; Jaromir Malek, “The Old Kingdom (c.2686-2125 BC),” in Ian Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 93-94]. Rainer Stadelmann incorporates this year’s events in with the other annalistic deeds in the Palermo Stone: “... the main events of Sneferu’s reign were campaigns to Nubia and Lybia that brough back a sizable booty of cattle and people, who were presumably settled in the thirty-five crown estates – villages and towns in the Faiyum and the Delta that the king founded” [Rainer Stadelmann, “Builders of the Pyramids,” in Jack M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, Volume II* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995), 724-725].

²⁸ E.g. “... establishing an estate not only fulfills a pious obligation which affirms Pharaoh’s concern with the welfare of the population, but also serves a set of pragmatic economic requirements” [Hratch Papzian, *Domain of Pharaoh: The Structure and Components of the Economy of Old Kingdom Egypt* (University of Chicago Ph.D. Dissertation, 2005), 86].