THE WOMEN OF THUTMOSE III IN THE STELAE OF THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

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Abstract
New epigraphic analyses of two well-known stelae in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, reveal queenly females of Thutmose III whose names were erased and reinscribed with those of other queens. Specifically, in stela CG 34013, the name of God’s Wife Neferure was replaced with that of Satiah. In CG 34015, the name of Great Royal Wife Merytre was replaced with that of Isis. Explanations are offered for each usurpation.

Keywords
epigraphy, Merytre-Hatshepsut, proscriptions, queens, royal stelae, Satiah, Thutmose III, palimpsest

The purpose of this study is to examine a series of palimpsest inscriptions on a pair of stelae of King Thutmose III in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, namely CG 34013 and CG 34015. Each stela depicts Thutmose III and a female standing before a deity worshiping and presenting offerings. What makes the inscriptions historically interesting is that while the figures of the women, in one case a queen, are mostly intact, and their titles are preserved as originally carved, the names inside their cartouches have been altered. In each example, they were erased on at least two successive occasions, carved and recarved at least a total of three times. Complicating the issue is that during the Amarna Period, the figures and texts were erased then subsequently restored under Sety I. Here Sety I’s restorers shifted the original texts and decorative scheme to include restoration inscriptions and formulae.

At issue is the specific identity of the women, since the original names beneath the erasures are still open to some question. Because the titles were never altered, they appear with the later names. Therefore, an analysis of the titles together with a close study of the surface of the stone and the traces of the cuts of the earlier inscriptions will hopefully reveal the original names inscribed in the cartouches. These names would then provide some basis for interpreting the position and function of these women in the Egyptian royal family. While these stelae have been discussed by scholars over the years, no epigraphical drawings of the inscriptions and palimpsests have been published previously.

Catalogue Général 34013
Cairo Catalogue Général 34013 (JdE 34642) is a black granite, round-top stela originally erected by Thutmose III in the small temple of Ptah, South-of-His-Wall-in-Thebes, located in the Karnak temple complex. It was first published and translated by Maspero (1900) then by Legrain (1902), Breasted (1906), Sethe (1907), and Lacau (1909). Over the years it had been discussed by many scholars, including an illuminating commentary by Vandersleyen (1971). Only recently, it was republished as part of a larger study by Andrea Klug with a complete bibliography. The purpose of the stela was to commemorate the king’s rebuilding and rededication of the temple ca. year 23 or 24.
The overall design of the decoration is typical of royal stelae of the New Kingdom. At the top of the lunette, a winged sun disk arches over the scene and inscriptions (see Plate 1). The decoration is laid out symmetrically with nearly identical offering scenes on the right and left sides as mirror-images of each other. On the right side, Thutmose III faces left and presents hnw-jars of wine to a statue of Ptah, Lord of Ma‘at, King of the Two Lands, while behind him a queenly figure offers jars of oil. On the left side, Thutmose III faces right and offers jars of cool water to a statue of Ptah, South of His Wall, Lord of Ankhtawy, while the queenly figure behind him presents oil. The statues of Ptah are situated back-to-back of each other, and situated vertically between them, at the center of the lunette, is a column of the restoration text of Sety I. The remains of gold paint are found in many of the figures and hieroglyphs. Below the lunette are twenty-seven horizontal lines of the dedicatory inscription.

Very clear in the lunette are the effects of the Atenist erasure and subsequent restoration. Close inspection reveals that Sety I replaced the scene nearly exactly, since clear traces of the original Thutmosid scene and the bases of the cuts of the original carving are still evident on the surface of the stone, especially the buttocks and back of the legs of each Ptah-figure and the legs of the king on the right. The Atenists had erased nearly the entire lunette, attacking the figures of Ptah and the king and their inscriptions. However, they left intact the winged sun disk and much of the bodies of the queenly figures, and the two areas behind them. Those areas of the ladies that they did erase were later restored, although only partially or in a defective manner. So, the headdresses on both sides are incompletely sculpted and without much detail. Still, enough remains to recognize the vulture cap commonly worn by queens of the New Kingdom.

The abraded surface of stone in the lunette continues partially into the dedication inscription below (see Plate 1). This surface abrasion extends through the left half of the top seven lines of the text; however, the hieroglyphs here are still original. They were not erased and recarved. Furthermore, this abraded area is outlined on the right and bottom by a crack in the stone running vertically and curving to the left. Although some natural erosion cannot be precluded, the overall impression is that the Egyptians started to sand back the inscription beginning at the left but then quickly abandoned the effort. Interestingly, while the Atenists did attack the name of Ptah in the lunette (since Theban Ptah was identified with Amun), they left the names of both Ptah and Amun undisturbed in the dedication inscription below. The pattern of partial abrasion lead us to question if some physical obstruction once stood in front of the stela where it was erected in the temple and which blocked the Atenists from fully proscribing the names of the gods in the text.

For the most part, as the stela now stands, the figures of the king are much taller than the royal lady and only slightly taller than the statues of Ptah. The restored Ramesside figures represent Ramesside artistic proportions, specifically, and not Thutmosid, since they are taller and slightly thinner than the original Thutmosid, whose traces are clear. On the other hand, the bodies of the queenly lady appear original and not recarved (except for the head and face on the left). They conform to the earlier Thutmosid proportions, for which reason the later king’s figures tower over them in a manner uncharacteristic of Eighteenth Dynasty royal inscriptions. Also, the Ramesside figures have been shifted slightly outward and away from the center of the lunette to accommodate space for Sety’s renewal inscription. In this regard, the later king’s figures are pushed closer to the earlier lady’s figures, slightly crowding the corners of the lunette.

As the stela was reinscribed in the Nineteenth Dynasty, the text of the royal lady behind the
king on each side reads (see Figures 1-2):

\[ \text{Hm.t nTr [S3.t-i}^\text{f}h]\text{] nH.ti} \]

God’s Wife, [Satiah], may she live.

Satiah was the earliest recorded Great Royal Wife (\textit{hm.t nswt wr.t}) of King Thutmose III. Actually, in each cartouche two versions of Satiah’s name exist. The first was carved by the original usurpers and was erased by the Atenists. The second and final version was restored under Sety I. In the two cartouches, traces of the first version of the moon-sign (\textit{i}^\text{f}h) are still clear. In addition to the name of Satiah, traces still exist of the original female’s name that was first inscribed in the cartouches. Thus, we detect three generations of inscriptions in the two cartouches. Over the years, scholars have been divided in their opinions as to whose name was originally written beneath that of Satiah. Some have argued for Queen Merytre-Hatshepsut, last wife of Thutmose III, others for Princess Neferure. Still others could make no determination. In 1902 Legrain, who first discovered and examined the stela, wrote, “Le cartouche de la reine derrière Thotmès n’était pas primitivement (\textit{\ldots})”. However, in 1909 Lacau was less assured of the reading:

right side: Ce cartouche a dû contenir primitivement un autre nom: au-dessous du croussant on voit les trace d’un \( \text{\textbullet} \) mal effacé; de même devant l’oiseau \( \text{\textbullet} \) il y a des traces d’un creux indistinct. \ldots

left side: Ce cartouche, comme celui de droite, a dû contenir d’abord un autre nom: on voit très nettement sous la croissant un disque \( \text{\textbullet} \) et sous l’oiseau le trace d’un signe indistinct. Il n’a pas pu y avoir (\textit{\ldots}) primitivement.\textsuperscript{10}

Although neither Legrain nor Lacau distinguished the three episodes of inscribing, they were mostly correct in their analyses, even if incomplete. The usurpers’ intent was to convert the \( \text{\textbullet} \) to a \( \text{\textbullet} \) by adding a crescent to it. In the original usurpation, the specific alteration of the sun disk \( (r^*) \) into a moon-sign \( (i}^\text{f}h \) occurred in both cartouches, when the usurpers cut a simple crescent through the center of the sun disk, and then apparently plastered smooth the upper half of the disk.\textsuperscript{12} However, during the Nineteenth Dynasty, in the left cartouche the restorers placed the moon-sign entirely \textit{separately and above} the sun disk (Figure 1), while in the right cartouche they carved the crescent \textit{above and touching} the original sun disk to form the moon-sign (Figure 2).

As for Legrain’s single \textit{nf}r-sign, actually, the bottoms of three \textit{nf}r-signs \( (nf^w) \) are distinct in both cartouches. They are plainly evident through the legs and bodies of each duck \( (s\overline{\text{i}}\text{-hieroglyph}) \), and they are generally centered below the sun disk. In the left cartouche, the sun disk is shifted slightly left of center, while in the right cartouche, it is fully centered. The right cartouche also reveals the vertical stem of the first \textit{nf}r-sign \( (\text{\textbullet}) \) situated to the left of the neck of the duck. Similarly, Vandersleyen reported detecting two \textit{nf}r-signs by the touch of his finger in the right cartouche.\textsuperscript{13} Just below the left cartouche are additional traces of the earlier inscription, where two nearly circular signs like large round beads (or the bottoms of \textit{nf}r-signs?) are nearly vertically aligned with the \textit{nf}r-signs in the cartouche above them. Their reading and meaning are uncertain.

It is clear according to the epigraphical traces in the cartouches, together with the title \textit{hm.t}...
ntr, God’s Wife, that originally the name (𓊧𓊚𓊜𓊢𓊢) Neferure was inscribed on the stela and then subsequently replaced with that of Satiah. Historically, Queen Satiah never carried the title God’s Wife in her lifetime, while it was standard for Princess Neferure, the daughter of Hatshepsut. The orthographic traces in the cartouches do not fit the name of any other God’s Wife from the reign of Thutmose III, including Queen Merytre and Princess Meritamun. In addition, Neferure was regularly depicted performing queenly rituals during the coregency of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, despite that apparently, she did not carry the title hm.t nswt wr.t, Great Royal Wife. Almost certainly, the usurpation was conducted under Thutmose III. Reconstructing Neferure’s name in the cartouches is significant for history and chronology, since it reveals that Neferure was still alive around year 23 or 24 of Thutmose III, the date of the stela, and evidently still performing the same queenly functions that she exercised in the reign of Hatshepsut while bearing only the title hm.t ntr, God’s Wife. Prior to this stela, the highest known regnal-year date for Princess Neferure was year 11, and until recently it was thought that she died before year 16.

Catalogue Général 34015
Cairo Catalogue Général 34015 (JdE 27815) is a fragment of a red quartzite round-top stela (dimensions: ca. 56 cm. x 54 cm.). It was discovered in 1905 by Arthur Weigall in his excavations of the mortuary temple of Thutmose III named Hw.t Mn-hpr-r Hnk.t-nh at Sheikh abd el-Qurna in Western Thebes, where the stela was originally erected. Later Lacau published it more fully, after which it was discussed by Legrain. More recently, it was republished by Klug with full bibliography.

Of the entire stela, only the right half of the lunette survives today. The surface has a shiny brown patina, and it is painted in colors that are still fairly vibrant. Enough of the stela exists to indicate that the decorative scheme conforms closely to stela CG 34013 above, and it also was partially erased in the Amarna Period then restored under Sety I. The Atenists did not erase the lunette entirely. They removed the figure and titulary of Amun-Re, while they left intact the name of Thutmose III and the figures of the king and the queen. However, they did erase the cartouche and the name of the queen, which were subsequently restored in Dynasty 19.

Thutmose III faces left and stands before Amun-Re in a pose of worship, his arms extended downward, palms turned backward. Standing behind him is a queen presenting two jars of wine. Her titulary reads (see Figure 3):

hm.t nswt wr.t mry.t.f hnw.t Smw.w Mhw [3st] nh.ti dt
Great Royal Wife, beloved of him, the Mistress of Upper and Lower Egypt [Isis], may she live forever.

Weigall was the first to describe the palimpsest in the queen’s cartouche:

The cartouche of the queen has been erased and it seems the name of Aset has been superimposed over another sign, of which the first sign 𓊧 is visible under .

Examination of the stela reveals that a wide area of surface surrounding the cartouche, as well as its interior, was ultimately erased. This wide erasure beyond the bounds of the cartouche seems to be the work, specifically, of the Atenists, since the abrasion of the stone here is similar to the
erasure around Amun-Re. It does not appear to be the work of Thutmose III’s agents, who apparently limited their excision to the interior of the cartouche, similar to stela CG 34013. Also, the depth of the erasure inside the cartouche is 1.5 mm or more, while the area outside is only 1 mm deep, suggesting two separate incidences of erasure inside the cartouche. However, unlike stela CG 34013, it is not possible to clearly detect the first (i.e. Thutmosid) version of Isis’ name, although enough errant traces exist in the cartouche to suggest its presence.

Historically, Isis was not a Great Royal Wife during her lifetime. She was the mother of Thutmose III, and in the reign of Thutmose II, she was merely a minor wife of the king. With a sun disk ( ) inscribed at the top of the cartouche, the only viable possibilities for the original name are writings of Nfrw-r and Mry.t-r. In 1908, Legrain advocated reading the name as Merytre, but scholars were skeptical that she could have been proscribed here, when she otherwise survived so successfully into the reign of her son, Amenhotep II. Based on Weigall's description, I once believed the name was Nfrw-r. However, after examining the original, I conclude the pattern of traces cannot support that reading.

Close study of the cartouche shows that the sun disk is not centered at the top of the cartouche, as one would expect for Nfrw-r. Rather, it is shifted well to the left to accommodate another sign on the right which appears to be the back of the -hieroglyph (HAt). Below this group, a curving line and vertical stroke could fit the traces of (sps), followed by (mr[]) further below. These traces do conform to known spellings of the name of Mry.t-[At-Sps(w)].

The historical circumstances of the stela also argue against the name of Neferure here. Since the stela dates to later in the reign of Thutmose III, commensurate with the date of his mortuary temple, it is unlikely that Neferure ever appeared here (and bearing the only surviving example of the queen’s title), while in the intervening years other queens of Thutmose III are so clearly documented.

What is known of Merytre-Hatshepsut? She succeeded Satiah as Thutmose III’s Great Royal Wife. Gitton and Leclant have suggested that she was the daughter of Huy, Divine Votaress of Amun and Atum. She was the first Eighteenth Dynasty queen of non-royal blood to carry the title God’s Wife. Ultimately, she also bore the title God’s Hand. She is depicted in the famous tableau in the tomb of Thutmose III in which three royal wives and a daughter stand behind the king in reverse chronological order. Each queen is titled “royal wife” (hm.t nswt). The latest wife stands first behind the king; the earliest wife stands last among the wives. Thutmose III heads the line, and he is described as m3-ḥrw, “justified” (i.e., deceased). The first queen after him is Merytre with the epithet “nh.tti (“living” or “may she live”). The second queen is Satiah with the epithet m3.t-ḥrw. The third queen is named Nebtu, epithet uncertain, possibly m3.(t)-ḥrw. Finally, a king’s daughter, Nefertiru, justified, appears behind the three wives. Hence, this specific sequence would indicate that Nebtu predeceased Satiah, who predeceased Merytre, and the latter survived Thutmose III. It is also significant that Neferure’s name does not appear here.

Merytre enjoyed a prominent status late in the reign of Thutmose III, so in the stela of Neferperet, her titulary and epithets include:

\[ \text{iry.t p}^t \text{wr.t hsw.t Šms.t, sn.s nṯr nfr nrr t nb tŠwy mš n.s hm.t nswt wr.t Mry.t-r H3t-ḥpsw.t nh.tl m R}^c . . . nb.t hsw.t m ḫn(r).t ḫ hnw.t n.t hnw.t nswt tm.t t Š r-gs nb tŠwy \]

Hereditary princess, great of favors, who follows her husband, the Good God, she whom the Lord of the Two Lands loves when (he) looks at her, the Great Royal Wife, Merytre-Hatshepsut, may she live like Re forever. . . . possessor of favors in the private apartments.
of the palace, mistress of the king’s wives, who is never (lit. “not”) absent from beside the Lord of the Two Lands.\textsuperscript{30}

She was also important as the mother of Amenhotep II, and she was prominent in his early monuments, especially those dating from the coregency with Thutmose III. On these she also carried the titles \textit{hm.t ntr} and \textit{dr.t ntr}, God’s Wife, God’s Hand.\textsuperscript{31} In the sole reign of Amenhotep II, Merytre was exalted even further, e.g., in a decorated doorway at Karnak North:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{lintel:} \textit{hm.t nswt nswt wr.t hnw.t t3wy}. . .
  \begin{itemize}
    \item king’s wife, great mother of the king, mistress of the Two Lands . . .
  \end{itemize}
  \item \textbf{left jamb:} \textit{iry.t p’t wr.t hsw.t hnr.t [mrw.t] hm.t nswt [wr.t] . . .
  \begin{itemize}
    \item hereditary princess, great of favors, sweet of [love], [great] royal wife . . .
  \end{itemize}
  \item \textbf{right jamb:} \textit{[hm.t nswt hnw.t t3wy] hnm.t nfr hdt}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item [great royal wife, mistress of the Two Lands], she who is joined to the White Crown.\textsuperscript{32}
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

In the tomb of Amenhotep II, she also bore the title \textit{nb.t t3wy}, Lady of the Two Lands.\textsuperscript{33} Hence, her presence on stela CG 34015, dating to later in the reign of Thutmose III, was consistent with her general importance at that time.

Given Merytre’s prominence, the nature of her palimpsest inscription on stela CG 34015 leads us to ask the obvious question. Why on a stela from Thutmose III’s mortuary temple, from the latter part of his reign, would Thutmose III excise the name of his living wife - the mother of his heir who enjoyed high status at court and continued to do so into the next reign - and replace it with the name of his almost certainly deceased mother, Isis, who was only a minor wife of his father?

The only other erasures that Thutmose III clearly expedited late in his reign were directed against the memory of Hatshepsut who was already dead more than twenty years by this time. In 1966, Charles Nims first argued that this proscription had to begin after regnal year 42, and Peter Dorman has also convincingly demonstrated a date late in the reign for the start of these attacks.\textsuperscript{34} As a result, many scholars now accept a date as late as year 46 or 47.\textsuperscript{35} Precipitating this proscription was Thutmose III’s concern for a crisis looming in the royal succession. Previously, the only other known heir to the throne was Prince Amenemhat, a “king’s eldest son,” mentioned in an inscription of years 23-24, when, apparently as a boy or a teenager, he was appointed overseer of the cattle and milk cows of Amun.\textsuperscript{36} By ca. year 42 or so, he was probably dead, requiring Thutmose III to designate a new heir, the future Amenhotep II.

The proscription began about 4 to 9 years before the coregency, and Amenhotep II would have been 7 to 14 years old at that time.\textsuperscript{37} The character and timing of the proscription suggests that in promoting the ascendency of his paternal lineage over Hatshepsut and her line, Thutmose III was seeking to stabilize and guarantee the succession for his young son, who probably was being groomed as heir-apparent. At nearly the same time, Thutmose III promulgated his retrospective account according to which Amun personally designated him future king - while still a boy - in the presence of his father during a festival procession at Karnak.\textsuperscript{38} This story could serve no useful purpose so late in the king’s reign, unless he felt a need to redefine his own position and origins retroactively to further safeguard the succession for an immediate heir.

The palimpsest on stela CG 34015 can be interpreted in the same light. By replacing his living wife’s name with that of his mother, Thutmose III was elevating Isis retroactively to the status of great royal wife. These actions would have been part of his program to reposition his lineage and
legitimize his succession independently of Hatshepsut’s mentoring, and so protect the coming accession of his own son. As he often replaced Hatshepsut’s name with that of his father and grandfather, so in a limited context, he could commensurately replace his current wife’s name with that of his mother. In this act, he was directing no personal animosity against Merytre, only dispassionate political expediency. Presumably, Merytre would have cooperated willingly in this endeavor to enhance her own son’s hold on the royal succession.

In Cairo Museum stelae CG 34013 and CG 34015, two different motivations are clear in the usurpations of the original female figures. In CG 34013, the name of God’s Wife Neferure was replaced with that of Satiah. Nowhere else does Satiah carry the title of God’s Wife, which indicates that inscribing her name was not part of a larger plan to promote her to that title. Therefore, the usurpation of this stela was probably prompted by the death of Neferure sometime after year 23 or 24 and the simple need to replace her in the iconography. On the other hand, in stela CG 34015 a more significant motivation prompted the usurpation of Merytre’s title, i.e., the need to rewrite dynastic history by promoting King’s Mother Isis to Great Royal Wife. Here the king’s purpose was to protect his son and enhance the royal succession for the heir apparent. In neither case was Thutmose III led by any emotional considerations. Rather, in both stelae, his concern was to do whatever was necessary to maintain the family enterprise. It was nothing personal, just business.

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Notes

1. I began work on this topic some years ago as part of a larger study on the genealogy of the royal family in the early Eighteenth Dynasty. On several occasions over the last few years, I was permitted to examine and photograph the stelae and to document them epigraphically. I extend my sincerest thanks to the officials of the Egyptian Museum for kindly permitting me to study them, especially at the time, the Director of the Museum, Dr. Mamdouh el-Damaty, and his assistant, Mr. ‘Adil Mahmud, who directly facilitated my work and cheerfully accommodated every professional need.


5. This date is based on a reference in the inscription (line 9) to the king’s apparently recent return from Canaan and Syria on his first occasion of victory (i.e., year 23); including a reference to the

6. E.g., the Abydos stela of Ahmose (CG 34002), the Victory Stela of Thutmose III (CG 34010), the Armant stela of Thutmose III (*JdE* 67377), and the Dream Stela of Thutmose IV.

7. So the earlier right knee of the king on the right is lower than the corresponding Ramesside knee, and the buttocks of both Ptah-figures are higher than their Thutmosid antecedents. Also Ptah's scepter on the left is longer and higher than the original, and it extends further away from the body than the original scepter.

8. When Eighteenth Dynasty royal stelae employ hierarchic proportion in rendering the king and queen, generally, the queen is still proportionately larger than the royal lady on this stela, e.g., stelae CG 34015 and Leipzig 2429 (Klug, *Königlichen Stelen*, pls. 13, 18); cf. Epigraphic Survey, *Tomb of Kheruef*, OIP 102 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1980), pls. 42, 49.

9. See now Klug, *Königlichen Stelen*, 143-144, for a recapitulation of this debate.


12. Subsequently, during the Atenist erasures, the plaster would have fallen away, revealing the entire disk again.


15. A very unlikely possibility is that it was ordered later by Amenhotep II; however in this case, we would expect him to have inscribed his mother's name, Merytre, instead.


21. The paint in the lunette dates from the restoration of the stela or later. Traces of a blue pallor are found on the skin of Amun, while his crown, blouse and kilt are painted gold. The skin of Thutmose III is a well preserved reddish umber; his *šndy.t*-kilt and tail are gold, as is his uraeus (apparently); the blue of his *ḥprḥ*-crown is also clear. The body of the queen is gold; her crown and wine jars are red. Blue paint also survives in many of the hieroglyphs in the text of the lunette.


29. Some scholars transcribe this name as Nebetta. According to Sethe, *Urk*. 4, 602, (9, note a), the short horizontal sign at the end of the queen’s name is the irrigated land-determinative (Gardiner N23) written partially in hieratic. However, this explanation does not account for the vertical stroke before the quail chick-*w* of *Nbt.w*. Rather, the vertical and horizontal signs might represent a defective hieratic writing of *m3r.(t)-ḥrw* employing graphic transposition in the placement of the vertical *ḥrw*-oar.

30. Legrain, *Statues et statuettes* 1, 69-71, pl. 71; Sethe, *Urk*. 4, 603 (4-10).

31. E.g., in the tomb of Rây, Theban tomb 72, dating to the coregency, she is depicted enthroned with the young Amenhotep II, K. Richard Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Nicolai, 1849-1856), pl. 62.; Sethe, *Urk*. 4, 1368.


37. The coregency began in year 51 of Thutmose III, when Amenhotep II was probably in his sixteenth year of age, so E. Wente, “The Age of Death of Pharaohs of the New Kingdom Determined from Historical Sources,” in *X-Ray Atlas*, 252. If the proscription began in year 42, Amenhotep would have been 7-9 years old. If it began in year 47, he would have been 12-14; hence, on the outside, he would have been 7-14 years old.