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# A New Meaning of the Expression *s.t-wr.t*: Place where the King is Crowned and Receives the Signs of the Sed-Festival

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The present article proposes a new connotation to the expression *s.t-wr.t*, “Great Place”, that could be added to the several meanings that Egyptology has already bestowed on this term. It will be shown that the *s.t-wr.t* could also refer to the place where, during the Ramesside period the king was crowned and received the signs of the *Sed*-Festival, as part of the ceremonies confirming royal power.

*Un nuevo significado de la expresión s.t-wr.t: lugar donde el rey es coronado y recibe los signos de la fiesta Sed*  
El presente artículo pretende añadir un nuevo concepto a la expresión *s.t-wr.t*, “Gran Lugar” a los ya extensos significados que se han ido otorgado por la ciencia egiptológica. Aquí, tendremos ocasión de comprobar como el *s.t-wr.t* es también el lugar donde el rey del período ramésida es coronado y recibe los signos de la Fiesta Sed durante las ceremonias de la confirmación del poder real.

**Keywords:** Thebes, Ramesside Period, Great Place (*s.t-wr.t*), coronation, jubilees, confirmation of royal power.

**Palabras clave:** Tebas, período ramésida, Gran Lugar (*s.t-wr.t*), coronación, jubileos, confirmación del poder real.

The expression *s.t-wr.t* (Great Place) can have different meanings. It could denote the entire “temple”; a part of it, such as the “sanctuary”; the “pedestal upon which the sacred barque of the god would rest”; the “barque-shrine”; and the “support of the statue”, as well as the throne of either a king or a god.<sup>1</sup> With this article, we intend to contribute a new connotation to the different meanings that have been attributed so far to the expression *s.t-wr.t*.

## 1 | The expression *s.t-wr.t* in the context of coronation and delivery of jubilees

Thanks to the fact that three examples of the rituals involved in the confirmation of royal power have been preserved, all of them from the Nineteenth Dynasty — two in the great hypostyle hall at Karnak and one in the temple of Millions of Years of Ramesses II, the Ramesseum — we can argue that the episode of the royal coronation and delivery of jubilees

<sup>1</sup> For the various meanings of *s.t-wr.t*, see Goyon 1972: 19-23, 33-37; Spencer 1984: 108-114; Gabolde 1999: 199-200.

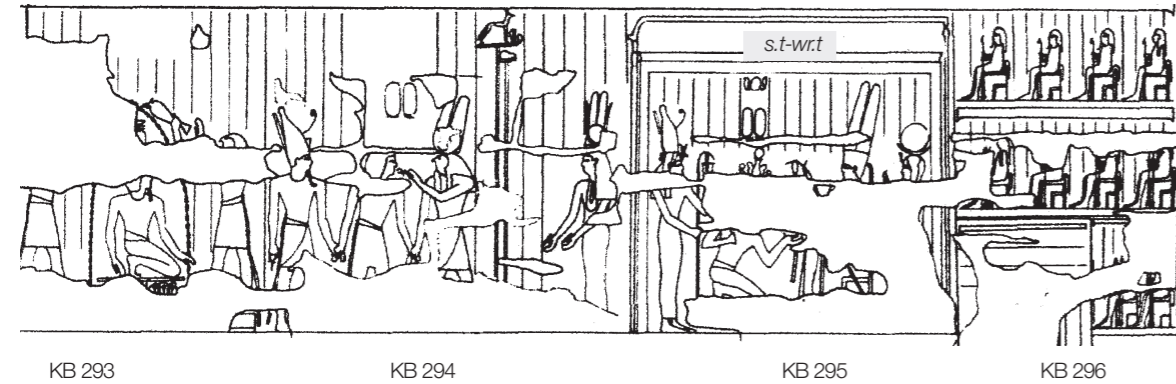


Figure 1. Great hypostyle hall at Karnak. Sequence of scenes KB 293 to KB 296 (Nelson 1981: pl. 263).

was held inside the *s.t-wrt*. In the following pages, we analyse these examples and use them to manifest the centrality of the *s.t-wrt* in the royal ceremonies.

### 1.1 | Great hypostyle hall at Karnak, scenes KB 293 to KB 296. Sety I

Interior, north wall, eastern half, bottom register, four scenes (fig. 1). Deteriorated scenes, which together constitute the best example of the itinerary that the sovereign had to follow until reaching the *s.t-wrt*, place where Sety I will be crowned and will receive the jubilees from the hands of Amun-Re, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands.

- In the scene KB 293, Sety I kneels on a platform composed of a *sm3-T3wy* motif (remains) while Horus the Behdetite and Thoth purify him with streams of water in the form of the hieroglyphic signs for “life”.<sup>2</sup>

- In the scene KB 294, Monthu and Atum lead Sety I into the temple while Hathor stands before them performing the *nyny*-ritual.<sup>3</sup> The goddess Hathor says to the king: “Come ye to the *s.t-wrt* that y[ou] might see your father [A]mun [...]”.<sup>4</sup>



- In the scene KB 295, inside the *s.t-wrt*, Sety I, kneeling, is crowned by Amun-Re and Mut, and receives jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Khonsu.<sup>5</sup>
- Last, in the scene KB 296,<sup>6</sup> fifteen members of the Great Ennead of Thebes sit enthroned, witnessing what happens inside the *s.t-wrt*. The divinities, represented on three registers are: Monthu Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, Nephthys, Horus, Hathor, Sobek, Tjenenet, and Yunyt.

<sup>2</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 45 (154, III, 2); Nelson 1981: pl. 198; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 261–262.

<sup>3</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 45 (154, III, 3); Nelson 1981: pl. 199; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 263–265.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson 1981: pl. 199, 11; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 264.

<sup>5</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 45 (154; III, 4); Nelson 1981: pl. 200; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 265–266; Costa 2004: I/2, 7–9 (scene 2).

<sup>6</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 45 (154; III, 5); Nelson 1981: pl. 201; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 266–67.

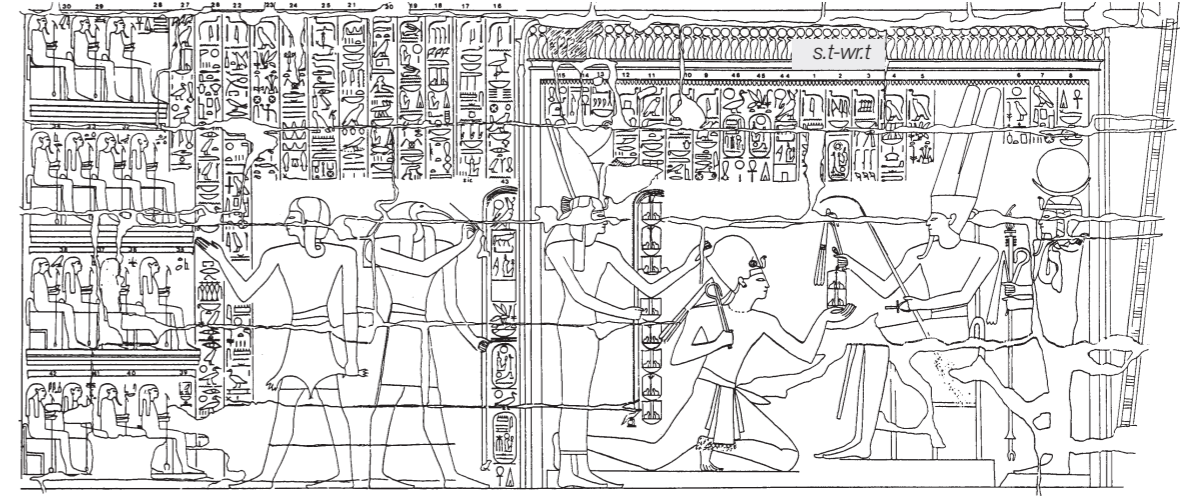


Figure 2. Great hypostyle hall at Karnak. Scenes KB 97 and KB 98 (Nelson 1981: pl. 52).

### 1.2 | Great hypostyle hall at Karnak, scenes KB 97 – KB 98. Ramesses II

Interior, south wall, west half, bottom register, west end (fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> Ramesses II, kneeling, receives the *h3*-sceptre, the *nh3h3*-flagellum, and years and myriads of jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Mut and Khonsu, while Thoth inscribes years of reign and Iunmutef addresses the Great Ennead of Thebes displayed on four registers: Montu, Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, the Ombite, Nephthys, Horus, Hathor, Sobek, Tjenenet, and Yunyt.

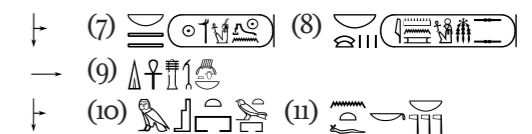
The goddess Mut, lady of Isheru, says to Ramesses II: “(I) have endured your heart in the *s.t-wrt*, in the presence of your father, the lord of the gods (*Amun-Re*)”.<sup>8</sup>



### 1.3 | Ramesseum, temple of Millions of Years of Ramesses II. Scene R 80. Ramesses II

Second court, portico, west wall, south half, middle register, second scene (fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> Ramesses II, kneeling on the *hb* sign, is crowned by Amun-Re and receives the jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Mut and Khonsu, and Thoth. The lord of Hermopolis writes down the length of his reign on three year-staves.

Above Ramesses II, we read: “The lord of the Two Lands, Usermaatre Setepenre, lord of Diadems, Ramesses II, given all life, stability, dominion, and joy, in the *s.t-wrt* of your father, the lord of the gods (*Amun-Re*)”.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 47 (158; III, 1; Nelson 1981: pl. 52; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 102-104; Costa 2004: I/2, 36–40 (scene 12).

<sup>8</sup> Nelson 1981: pl. 52, 10–11; Brand, Feleg and Murnane 2018: 103.

<sup>9</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 437 (13, II, 2).

<sup>10</sup> Helck 1972: 97–98; Costa 2004: I/2, 72–74 (scene 25).





Figure 3. Ramesseum, scene R 80. Photograph by Salvador Costa.

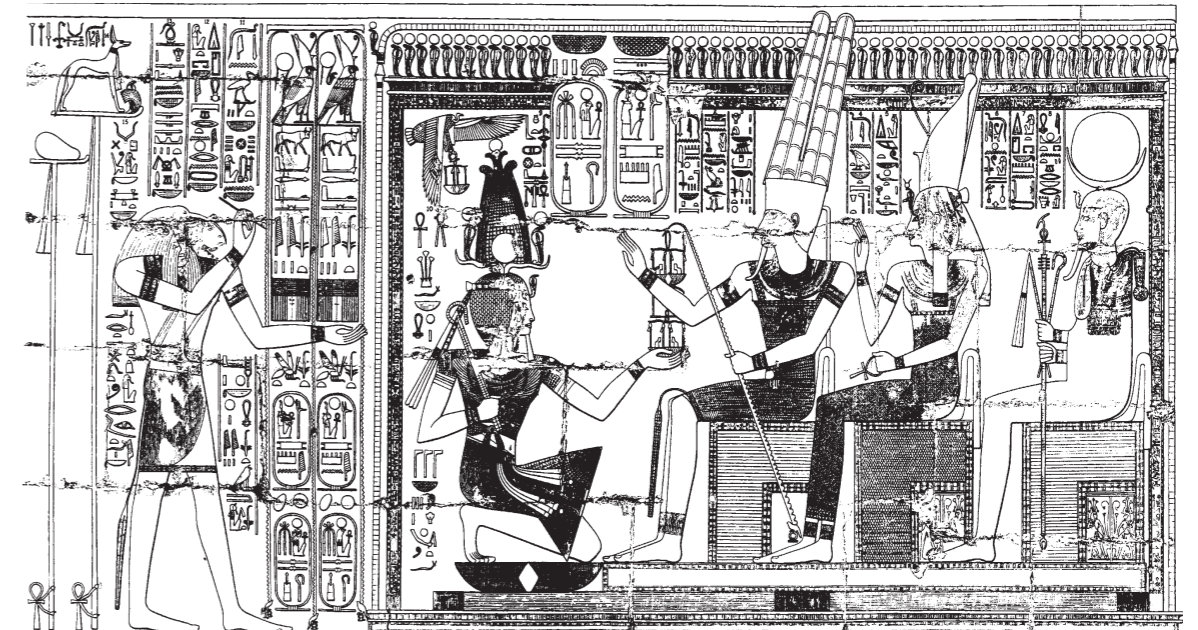


Figure 4. Medinet Habu, scene MHA 268 (Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 291).

## 2 | The Great Place (*s.t-wr.t*) and the temple of Medinet Habu

Although we do not know any scene belonging to Ramesses III with the mention of the *s.t-wr.t*, there are some striking iconographic similarities between the scene of the Ramesseum just described (R 80) and the scene MHA 268 depicted inside the West Portico of the second court of the temple of Millions of Years of Ramesses III. This is not strange because Ramesses III, from the beginning of his reign, acted according to his ancestor Ramesses II, adopting a similar conduct in his temple of Millions of Years with respect to the iconography and textual formulas of the *Sed*-Festival. A clear example of this “emulation” is reflected in the decoration of the wall at the end of

the West Portico of the second court of the temple at Medinet Habu.<sup>11</sup> Of the scenes that decorate this area of the temple, in both buildings, we will focus on scenes R 80 from the Ramesseum (see fig. 3) and MHA 268 from Medinet Habu (fig. 4).

The scenic iconographic similarity between both scenes is undeniable. In the scene MHA 268 of Medinet Habu, Ramesses III, kneeling on the *hb* sign, is crowned by Amun-Re and receives the jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Mut and Khonsu, and Thoth.<sup>12</sup> The god Thoth writes down the length of his reign on three year-staves (see fig. 4). The area where the king is represented, inside the *s.t-wr.t*, is the sector which merits special attention from us (R 80 = Ramesses II and MHA 268 = Ramesses III).

<sup>11</sup> For a comparative study between the back walls of the West Portico of both temples, see Costa 2014: 103–132.

<sup>12</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 501 (105, II, 4); Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 291; Costa 2004: I/2, 123–125 (scene 43).

### The king

- Orientation  
R 80 and MHA 268: →
- Posture  
R 80 and MHA 268: kneeling on the *hb* sign.
- Physical appearance  
R 80 and MHA 268: ritual beard; barefoot.
- Headdress  
R 80: with *3tf*-crown surmounting *nemes*, with frontal uraeus.  
MHA 268: with *3tf*-crown surmounting short wig (*ibes*) with headband and uraeus (*seshed*).
- Dress  
R 80: short kilt with triangular protection.  
MHA 268: short kilt with triangular projection and frontal ornament.
- Attitude  
R 80 and MHA 268: his right hand is placed on the chest and with it the king holds the *hk3*-sceptre and *nh3h3*-flagellum; with his left hand, he receives jubilees from Amun-Re.

### Above the king

- R 80: —
- MHA 268: the vulture goddess Nekhbet soars over Ramesses III's head. She is represented grasping the *snw*-sign with her claws - a circular sign that has no beginning or end and evokes a double concept, that of eternity and protection. Here, from the *snw*-sign, hangs a *hb-sd* sign.

The space above the figure of Ramesses II, in the scene from the Ramesseum, is occupied precisely by the text that makes reference to the king “given all life, stability, dominion, and joy, in the *s.t-wr.t* of your father, the lord of the gods”; however, in the scene of Medinet Habu, the vulture goddess Nekhbet stands above Ramesses III. The presence of this protective divinity, together with the larger size of the cartouches of Ramesses III, is most likely the reason why the text that follows the cartouches of the sovereign of the XIX dynasty is not represented above Ramesses III (fig. 5).



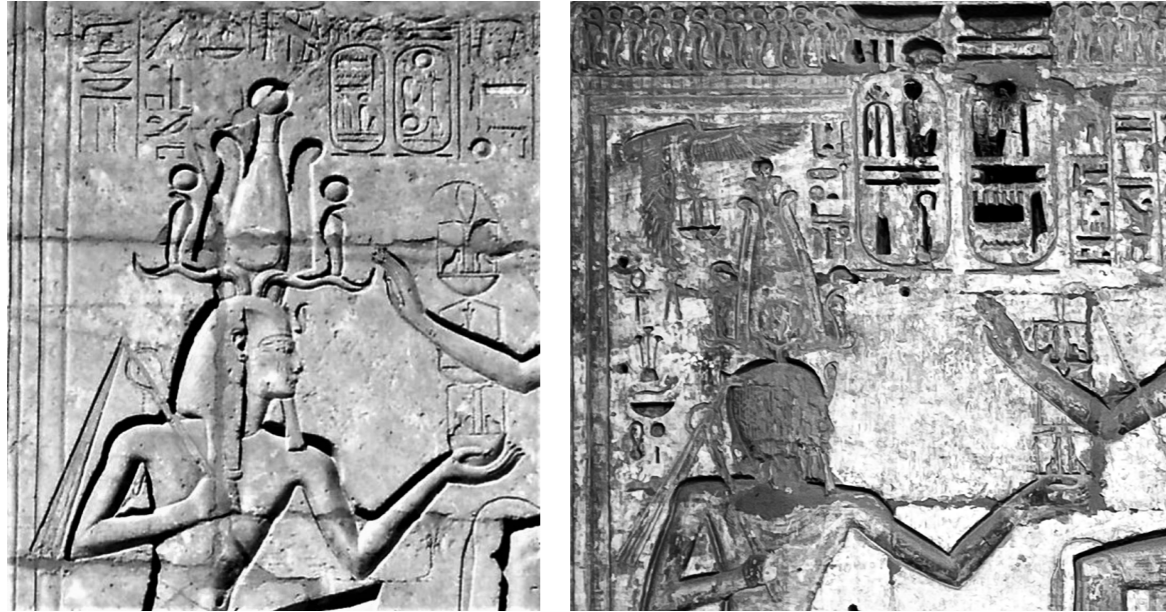


Figure 5a-b. The space above the figure of the King. a) Photograph by Salvador Costa. b) Chicago Oriental Institute, photo 3835, modified by Salvador Costa.

In Medinet Habu, in addition to scene MHA 268, there are other two scenes (MHA 104 and MHA 324) that evidence the fact that the king was crowned and received the jubilees in a place analogous to that represented in the three examples mentioned above. As in scene MHA 268, no textual mention is made of the expression *s.t-wr.t*.

- Scene MHD 104. Eastern high gate, passage, south wall, west section, lower register.<sup>13</sup> Ramesses III is crowned by Amun-Re and Mut and receives jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Thoth (fig. 6).<sup>14</sup> The king, standing, wears the *hmhm*-crown. His right hand is placed

on his chest and holds the *hk3*-sceptre and the *nh3h3*-flagellum (remains); with his left hand, he receives jubilees. The god Amun-Re tells the king: “Welcome in peace! My heart receives you; I rejoice at seeing your facial expression (*or* your face). I have placed for you the awe of me in your body and (I have given to you) my lifetime, my seat and my throne”,<sup>15</sup> while the goddess Mut adds: “[I establish for you the crowns] on your head (in) likeness of your father Re. (I) give to you millions of years and myriads of jubilees”.<sup>16</sup> The god Thoth, lord of Hermopolis, says: “The *atef*-crown is established upon his

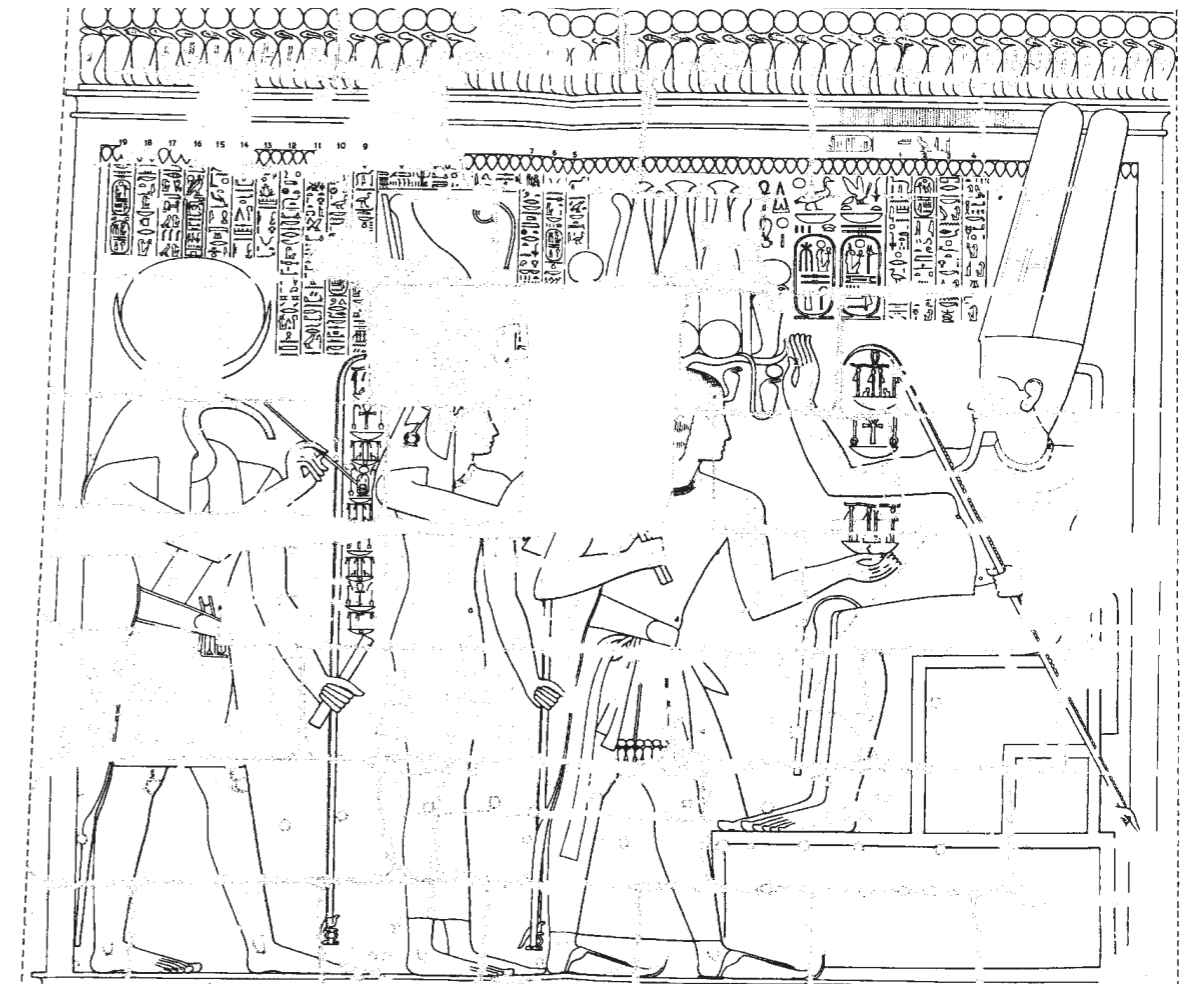


Figure 6. Scene MHD 104 (Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 612).

head, and he has received the *hk3*-sceptre and the *nh3h3*-flagellum. May you establish his titular like the sky bearing the sun, as Horus, mighty bull, great of kingship, that which I have put in writing with my fingers in your presence. (O) my father, lord of the Universal Lord”.<sup>17</sup>

- Scene MHA 324: Great temple. First hypostyle hall, south wall, east half, lower register.<sup>18</sup> Ramesses III, kneeling on the *hb* sign, is crowned by Amun-Re and Mut, and receives jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Khonsu and Thoth (fig. 7).<sup>19</sup> The king wears a headdress

<sup>13</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 484 (18).

<sup>14</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 612. In scene MHD 80, located on the opposite wall — passage, north wall, west section, lower register — the same sanctuary is represented as in scene MHD 104. Here, Ramesses III is conducted into the presence of Amun-Re by Monthu and Atum. See Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 484–485 (19); Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 614.

<sup>15</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 612, 2–4.

<sup>16</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 612, 7–8.

<sup>17</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 612, 13–18.

<sup>18</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 505 (113–114, II, 1).

<sup>19</sup> Costa 2004: I/2, 132–135 (scene 46); Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 316.



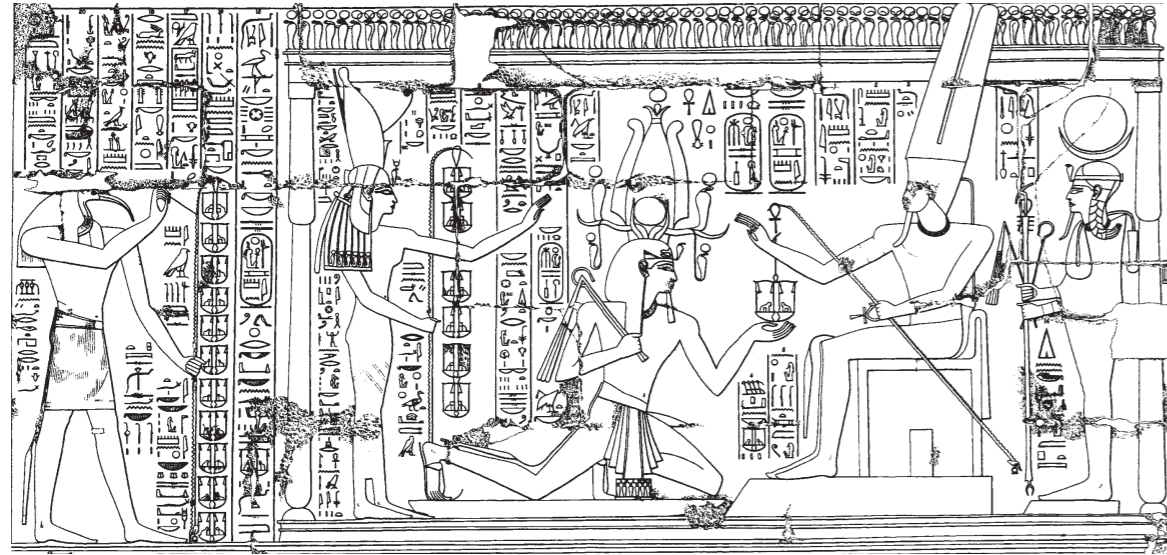


Figure 7. Scene MHA 324 (Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 316).

with *3tf*-crown surmounting *nms*-headcloth, and frontal uraeus. The god Amun-Re says to the king: “I establish the crowns on your head, forever and ever”,<sup>20</sup> while the goddess Mut adds: “I establish for you the crowns on your head in likeness of your father Re”.<sup>21</sup> Among the words spoken by the god Thoth, we read: “May you (*Amun-Re*) give to him millions of jubilees and an eternity of years, and that his titulary be enduring in your great temple as Horus, mighty bull, great of kingship before you”<sup>22</sup> and “The *3tf*-crown is establish on your head”.<sup>23</sup>

In the two scenes, the god Thoth, on the left side, is holding a year-staff with his left hand, from which in turn hang the hieroglyphic signs of

the *Sed*-Festival and on which he, as scribe of the gods, is about to register with his pen the years of reign and jubilees granted to the monarch.

Besides, the temple of Ramesses III also offers us some textual references related to *s.t-wr.t*. At Medinet Habu, in the bark-chapels of Amun of ‘United with Eternity’ (room 7), Monthu (room 15), and Khonsu (room 33), the expression *s.t-wr.t* appears, associated with the temple (*hwt*) of Usermaatere Meryamun.

- Room 7. Bark-chapel of Amun-Re of ‘United with Eternity’: On the scene MHA 377,<sup>24</sup> Ramesses III is led by Mut and Khonsu to Amun-Re,<sup>25</sup> with dedication-text below that states: “He (*Ramesses III*) has made as a monument for

his father Amun residing in ‘United with Eternity’, the making for him of an august *s.t-wr.t* in the temple of Usermaatere Meryamun”.<sup>26</sup>



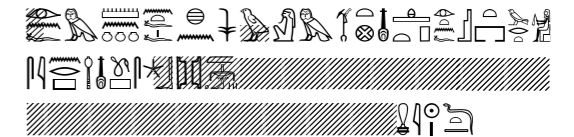
- Room 15. Bark-chapel of Monthu: On the north wall (MHA 364),<sup>27</sup> there are remains of scenes and a dedication-text at the base: “He (*Ramesses III*) has made as a monument for his father Monthu, the making for him of an august *s.t-wr.t* in the temple of Usermaatere Meryamun, ‘United with Eternity’, the beloved of Monthu, lord of Hermontis (*Armant*)”.<sup>28</sup>



- Room 33. Bark-chapel of Khonsu: On the south wall (MHA 557),<sup>29</sup> there are remains of scenes and a dedication-text at the base: “He (*Ramesses III*) has made as a monument for his father Khonsu residing in Thebes, the making for him of an august *s.t-wr.t*, in fine white sandstone, the double doors being of real electrum, in the temple of Usermaatere Meryamun, ‘United with Eternity’, on the western side of Thebes, which the son of Re, lord of Diadems, Ramesses III, had established for him, as a sovereign who is effective upon the throne of Atum like Re, forever and ever”.<sup>30</sup>



On the north wall (MHA 555),<sup>31</sup> there are also remains of scenes and dedication-text at the base: “He (*Ramesses III*) has made as a monument for his father Khonsu in Thebes Neferhotep, the making for him of an august *s.t-wr.t*, in fine white sandstone, the double doors being of real electrum [...] like Re, forever”.<sup>32</sup>



### 3 | The scene MHA 268 of Medinet Habu in the ritual of the renewal of the king's power

Next, we are going to compare the aforementioned sequence of scenes from Sety I in the great hypostyle hall at Karnak with a group of four scenes depicted in the middle register, which adjoin the axial door located in the back wall of the West Portico of the Temple of Millions of Years of Ramesses III (see fig. 8): two in the north side (MHA 269 and MHA 270), and two in the south side (MHA 267 and MHA 268).

The scenes depicted in the middle register describe, in a schematic way, the confirmation of royal power of the pharaoh. Likewise, they convey the desire of the sovereign to keep on enjoying a long reign that should allow him to celebrate many *Sed*-Festivals. Taking into account the ceremonial sequence of the ritual as it is preserved in the Brooklyn Papyrus 47.218.50,<sup>33</sup> we can basically distinguish the following sequence:

<sup>20</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 316, 2–3.

<sup>21</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 316, 10–11.

<sup>22</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 316, 15–17.

<sup>23</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 316, 19–20.

<sup>24</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 507 (129, e).

<sup>25</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1964: pl. 409.

<sup>26</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1964: pl. 409 (13); Kitchen 1969-90: V, 326, 9–10; Nelson 1942: fig. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 508 (137, h).

<sup>28</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1964: pl. 441C; Kitchen 1969-90: V, 326, 14–15.

<sup>29</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 513 (165, b).

<sup>30</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1964: pl. 501A; Kitchen 1969-90: V, 331, 3, 5, 7, and 9.

<sup>31</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 513 (165, c).

<sup>32</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1964: pl. 501B; Kitchen 1969-90: V, 331, 4, 6, 8, and 10.

<sup>33</sup> For the papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.50, see Goyon 1972.

### 3.1 | The king being purified

In KB 293 and in MHA 270,<sup>34</sup> the king is purified by Horus the Behdetite and Thoth. They pour streams of water over him, in the form of the hieroglyphic signs for “life” (KB 293) and in the form of the hieroglyphic signs for “life” and “dominion” (MHA 270).

### 3.2 | The king being led into the temple

In both scenes, KB 294 (Sety I, see fig. 1) and MHA 267<sup>35</sup> (Ramesses III, see fig. 8), Monthu and Atum lead the king into the temple. Only in KB 294, the goddess Hathor stands before Montu, Sety I, and Atum, performing the *nyny*-ritual in front of the *s.t-wr.t*.

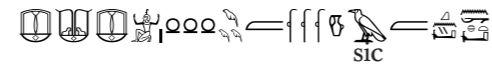
### 3.3 | The king inside the sanctuary, is crowned and receives the jubilees

In KB 295 (see fig. 1), Sety I inside the *s.t-wr.t* and kneeling, is crowned by Amun-Re and Mut, and receives jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Khonsu. In MHA 268 (see figs. 4 and 8), Ramesses III, kneeling, is crowned by Amun-Re and receives the jubilees from Amun-Re in the presence of Mut and Khonsu, and Thoth, depicted on the left side in front of the sanctuary. As we have previously verified, the expression *s.t-wr.t* is not mentioned in this scene from Medinet Habu.

### 3.4 | The king receives the insignia of kingship

Only in Medinet Habu, MHA 269 (see fig. 8).<sup>36</sup> Next to the door, on the north side, we find another

scene that belongs to the iconographic repertoire related to the renewal of the king's power. In this scene Ramesses III, standing before a sanctuary (*s.t-wr.t?*), receives the insignia of kingship — the *hk3*-sceptre and *nh3h3*-flagellum — from Atum in the presence of Iusaas, Nebet-Hetepet, and Seshat. The god Atum, directs the *nh*-sign and the *w3s*-sceptre with his left hand towards the king's nose; with his right hand he hands him the *hk3*-sceptre and *nh3h3*-flagellum. The lord of the Two Lands, the Heliopolitan, says to the king: “receive for yourself the *hk3*-sceptre and *nh3h3*-flagellum, (and) life and dominion to your nose”.<sup>37</sup> The goddess Seshat accompanies the king and writes down the length of his reign and the *Sed*-Festivals of Ramesses III on a year-staff, which ends in a sign (*hfn* and *šnw*, “a hundred thousand” or “myriad”). Text that hangs from the year-staff: “*Sed*-Festivals in great many and myriads of years united with valour and victory”.<sup>38</sup>



Above the goddess, we read: “I inscribe for you jubilees with myriads of years (being) like sand of river bank”.<sup>39</sup>



The contents of the scenes depicted on the West Portico of the Temple of Millions of Years of Ramesses III, as well as those of Sety I at Karnak (scenes KB 293 to KB 296), could be inserted in the usual iconographic cycle of renewal of the king's power which can be found in many temples scattered throughout the domain of Amun, purification, leading the king inside the temple, coronation and delivery of hundreds of millions of years with the *Sed*-Festival, and delivery of the royal insignia of kingship.<sup>40</sup>

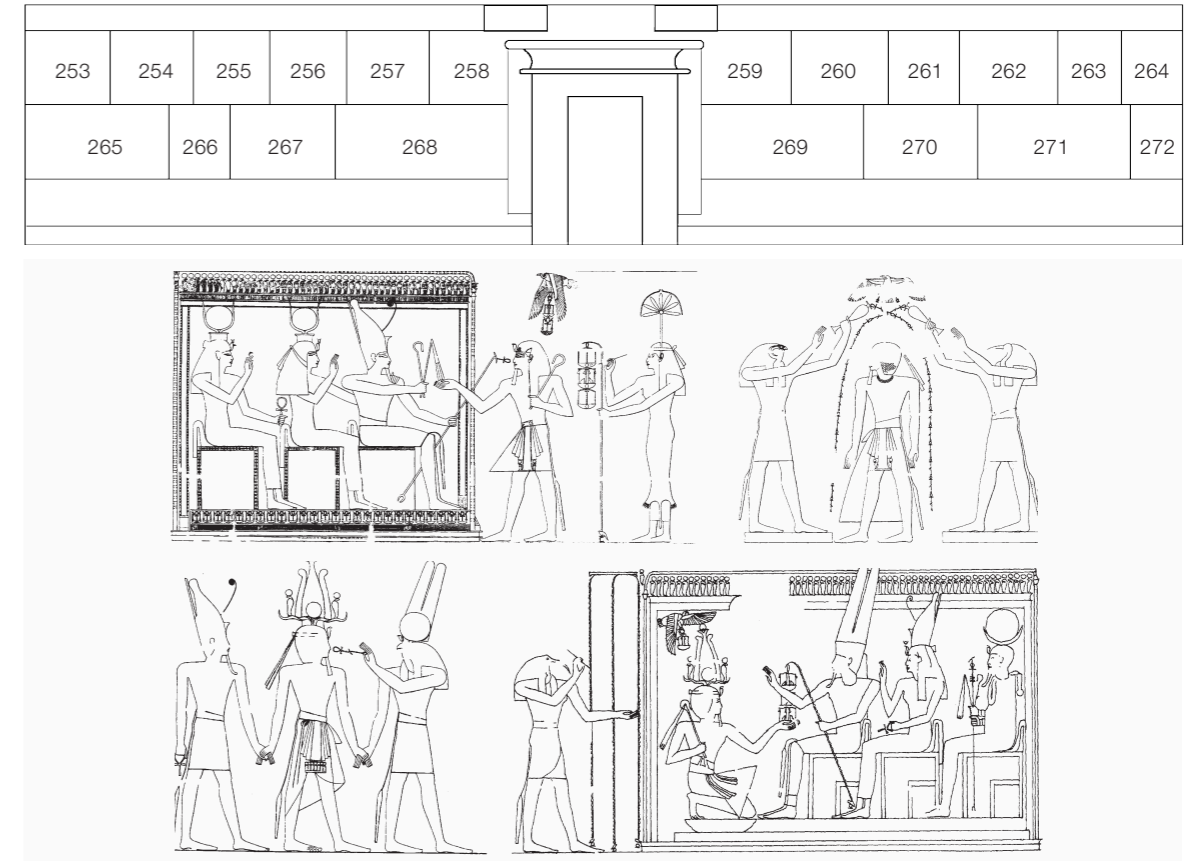


Figure 8. Ritual scenes inside the West Portico of Medinet Habu. Epigraphic Survey 1957: pls. 290B, 291, 295, and 296, modified by the authors.

The purification ritual was carried out in front of the door leading to the temple, the exact point where, passing from gloom to darkness, the rule of the gods who inhabited the temple began. Then, the king was introduced to the interior of this area of the temple, which constituted the sacred “Great Place” (*s.t-wr.t*), where all the ceremonies took place - among them, those linked to the rites of the anniversary and confirmation of royal power.

## 4 | Final note

The analysis we have made of the scenes where the king is crowned and receives the jubilees inside the Great Place (*s.t-wr.t*) proves that these scenes are part of the ritual which was held to confirm the royal power of the pharaoh. Furthermore, the scenes also belong to the group of depictions where the monarch receives the signs of the

<sup>34</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 502 (107, II, 3); Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 296; Costa 2013: I/2, 159–161 (scene 52).

<sup>35</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 501 (105, II, 3); Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 290B; Costa 2013: I/2, 131–133 (scene 42).

<sup>36</sup> Porter and Moss 1972<sup>2</sup>: 502 (107, II, 4); Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 295; Costa 2013: I/2, 161–165 (scene 53).

<sup>37</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 295, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 295, 1–3.

<sup>39</sup> Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 295, 7–8.

<sup>40</sup> Costa, García and Magadán 2022 (in press).

*Sed*-Festival. We should not lose sight of the fact that the scenes of the *Sed*-Festival appear among the wide iconographic repertoire that ornament the temples during the reign of Ramesses I, the first pharaoh of the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty,<sup>41</sup> and that they represent a symbol, a projection into the future, not a real event. They convey a desire of the king to celebrate *Sed*-Festivals. Actually, only two kings of the Ramesside period celebrated *Sed*-Festivals:

Ramesses II, who performed fourteen *Sed*-Festivals, and Ramesses III, who commemorated only one.

Taking all of this into account, we can affirm that the scenes dealt with in the article have a double significance. Firstly, they are part of the ritual of the ratification of the king's power, and they also manifest the desire of the pharaoh to live a long reign with "hundreds of thousands of years with *Sed*-Festivals".

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<sup>41</sup> For the scenes of the king receiving the jubilees, Costa 2004 and Costa 2006.



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