

Formulating relations

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Formulating Relations

An Approach to the *smyt*-Formula

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Summary: The language of monumental inscriptions on Middle Kingdom stelae is often regarded as highly standardised and formulaic, thus its potential for assessing social practices is considered to be fairly limited. An analysis that integrates textual and contextual evidence may, however, facilitate a better understanding of some formulae and the role those stelae played in the construction of contemporary social models. The rare *smyt*-formula is attested in nine objects of the late 12th or early 13th dynasty. Most of these are stelae found at Abydos, hence saturated with the site's cultic importance. Although their disparate stylistic features rule out their being products of a single workshop, the use of the formula and its arrangement after a list of personal names is strikingly consistent. The way in which people, who are mentioned on those lists, are related to the dedicatees of the monuments may provide a clue as to why this formula emerged in the late Middle Kingdom, a time when kinship relations were often celebrated and commemorated on stelae in the context of the ritual landscape of Abydos. Moreover, the *smyt*-formula signposts a latent tension between two modes of group formation, focused respectively on ego or on his ancestors.

Keywords: kinship – Abydos – stela MK – formula – group formation – commemoration – *smyt*-formula

Introduction

In his study of Middle Kingdom offering formulae, Detlef Franke (2003, 39) noted that these are so typical and recurrent that “they are generally passed over by Egyptologists rather automatically and without hesitation”. This lack of attention applies to the offering formula, but also to many other stock phrases and formulaic expressions, which are often seen as insignificant and of limited value for an interpretation of ancient Egyptian lived experience. Yet formulae have the potential to unlock a wealth of information that is otherwise not immediately accessible to the researcher, as demonstrated for example by Denise

Doxey’s (1998) analysis of how Middle Kingdom epithets reflect their holders’ interaction with superiors, peers, and subordinates.

One sphere that could benefit from this type of research is that of kinship and marriage, which is elusive in both the textual and archaeological record. Kinship and relatedness are often taken for granted, but they are actually constructed phenomena that vary depending on the socio-cultural circumstances in which they originate. What is generally regarded as a “family” in a modern Western tradition does not necessarily correspond with an emic understanding of relatedness in any other culture. Explicit descriptions of phenomena that are regarded as universal are rare, and that is why the sources are silent when it comes to defining the various terms that scholars have been rendered as “family” (e.g. Franke 1983, 178–302). It is therefore desirable to resort to indirect sources that may give some insight into the argument (e.g. Fitznerreiter 2005, 80–5).

Commemorative monuments such as stelae are a rich source for the study of family and social structure¹ because many of them depict and/or mention large numbers of individuals around ego – that is, the person who is regarded as the centre of a given social group. A stela is ultimately a condensed medium of self-presentation, and, as such, the choice to include specific people on it must have been significant. While the nature of these relationships is not always evident due to the relatively standardised nature of the monuments in question, they can help in reconstructing the social constellations that existed around an individual. Monumental inscriptions in general and formulaic expressions in particular can sometimes clarify aspects of social dynamics that would otherwise remain obscure. The *smyt*-formula provides an excellent illustration of this potential.

The *smyt*-formula was briefly discussed by Lange and Schäfer (1900) and Spiegel (1955, esp. 321), and Franke (1983, 260–2) devoted a short section to it, but none of these authors framed the formula within its social context, neither did they assess its wider implications. In this paper I present and characterise all attestations of the

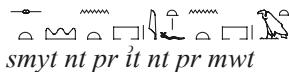
¹ Other sources of information on social dynamics include administrative texts (e.g. Eyre 2007) or religious literature (e.g. Willems 2015).

smyt-formula known to me, highlighting the most striking features of the contexts in which it appears. I then discuss the components of the formula separately in order to assess how they individually enrich and nuance the meaning of the formula as a whole. Finally, I present a hypothesis of how the *smyt*-formula could have been used to, in effect, formulate relatedness.

The *smyt*-formula and description of the sources

The nine attestations of the *smyt*-formula – with only slight variations – are summarised in Table 1. Seven examples are on stelae (nos 1–7, of which no. 4 has an offering table attached), one offering table (no. 8), and a graffito on the island of Konosso to the north of Philae (no. 9). All instances can be dated to the late 12th or early 13th dynasty on epigraphic and contextual grounds². A late Middle Kingdom date is also supported by a prominent cartouche of Amenemhat III on no. 7. Nos 1 to 7 are known to come from Abydos, and no. 8 (the offering table in Vienna) has been attributed to the same site. This leaves no. 9, the graffito, as the only attestation of the formula from elsewhere in Egypt.

Stela no. 5 exhibits a complete example of the typical *smyt*-formula



As shown in Table 1, most of the known attestations deviate only minimally from this standard formulation. For example, in no. 3 (see Figure 1) the full writing of the grammatically feminine genitival adjective *nt* is substituted by *n* after the term *smyt*, a common and almost unremarkable discrepancy (Allen 2014, 50–1). In nos 1 and 8 the initial phrase *n k³ n* comes before the *smyt*-formula, which may be a hypercorrection deriving from the use of the phrase *n k³ n smyt* on its own in some cases.

Nos 7 and 8 present some variation from the standard formula. The final part of the formula in no. 7 is broken and hence not legible. Maspero (1890, 114) originally suggested that the end of the line could be reconstructed as *m^{3c}-hrw*, but there seems to be sufficient space for *pr mw*.

² For example, no. 2 features two eyes on the lunette, pointing to a date in the late 12th dynasty or later (Hölzl 1990, esp. 34). The typology of no. 4, which combines an offering table and a stela, became popular in the late Middle Kingdom (Handoussa 1985, 373).

This would be a plausible reconstruction on the basis of parallels of the *smyt*-formula, as noted by Franke (1983, 257). In no. 8 the term *pr* occurs only once, possibly due to the lack of space on the offering table rather than to its being an altogether different construction.

In addition to a comparable orthography of the formula, the similarities in the layout of the inscriptions on all these objects are rather striking. The *smyt*-formula is consistently placed at the bottom part of the monument and always after a list of names. Similar name lists are widely attested in administrative documents dealing with the organisation of labour, taxation, and census keeping (Eyre 2013, 201–32), but their use in association with the *smyt*-formula need not be administrative. The placement of the formula suggests that in all cases it was intended to be read last, be it on a stela (e.g. no. 2), an offering table (e.g. nos 4 and 8), or a graffito (no. 9)³. No. 1 appears to be an exception to this pattern, but in this case the stela is divided into two halves, with the *smyt*-formula demarcating both parts. Thus, the formula is still being located at the end of the inscription of the upper half of the stela, and its placing after a short list of names is notable.

In some cases, the list of names followed by the *smyt*-formula is laid out in a tabular format. No. 3 is an excellent example, as it includes a bottom register with several names often preceded by titles, some of which are followed by the epithet *m^{3c}-hrw*. These names are carved in short vertical columns that contrast with the largely horizontal orientation of the main body of the stela (see Figure 1). This tabularisation is also observed in nos 5, 6, and 7. Many other stelae with similar lists of names in short vertical columns do not feature the *smyt*-formula, such as Cairo CG 20565 (Lange and Schäfer 1902b, 200–2; 1902c, pl. xlvi) and British Museum EA 223 (Franke and Marée 2013, 59–61, colour plate 1)⁴. Thus, while it is a feature worth noting, it is not unique to this corpus.

The commonalities between the monuments bearing the *smyt*-formula, however, seem to stop here. While in most cases this formula appears on stelae, it is also attested on offering tables and a graffito, which proves that it was not exclusively associated with one object type. Furthermore, it occurs on objects that have only an inscrip-

³ This trend has served to determine the direction of reading of stela no. 6 (see Figure 2). The hieroglyphs of the vertical lines at the bottom face right, but the register should nevertheless be read from left to right so that the *smyt*-formula will retain its usual order, with *pr it* followed by *pr mw*, and after the list of names.

⁴ Franke and Marée (2013, 61, n. 13) provide a more detailed list of examples, arguing that this feature only appears late in the reign of Amenemhat III, which is in keeping with the dating of the *smyt*-formula in the late Middle Kingdom.

tion but no figurative images (no. 2) as well as on those that combine inscriptions and images of the dedicatee and other people.

In terms of the shape of the stelae, most of them are round-topped ranging in height from 22 cm (no. 5) to 51 cm (no. 4, including the offering table at the bottom). The exception is no. 1, a rectangular stela with cavetto cornice. The objects also vary in style and epigraphic features, so that it would be impossible to ascribe them to the same workshop. For example, no. 3 has a fair amount of colour preserved – especially the skin of the figures in the bottom two registers – and features a painted band framing the stela (see Figure 1). Other objects exhibit traces of colour (e.g. no. 4), but without a comparable band, which is unique to no. 3. Although most of the objects are carved in sunk relief, the winged sun-disk on the lunette of no. 7 is in raised relief instead. Other lunettes show either text (nos 3 and 6) or udjat-eyes (nos 4 and 7). Human figures also vary in style, with some of them being carved in more detail (no. 6) and others done in the “silhouette style” in sunk relief with no internal modelling (no. 7; see e.g. Grajetzki 2001, 62–3). Hairstyles, proportions, and poses of the figures, which are generally taken into account for reconstructing artistic workshops, also present stark variation⁵.

An association of this formula with Abydos can be postulated, given that most of these objects seem to have been retrieved from that site. However, the existence of the graffito on the island of Konosso proves that it was not regarded as exclusively bounded to Abydos. The (supposed) findspot of an object is only one dimension in the assessment of its provenance, especially for somewhere like Abydos, where people from elsewhere in Egypt are documented to have travelled in order to be commemorated in connection with the Mysteries of Osiris⁶. For instance, internal evidence and links with other monuments show that stelae nos 5 and 6 feature kin groups from Qaw el-Kebir (Franke 1984, dossier nos 196, 197, 202, 484, 589). It would be tempting to extrapolate this shared geographical origin to assume that all owners of monuments that include the *smyt*-formula were from Qaw el-Kebir, but this would be unlikely. On the one hand, it is difficult to confirm where most of these objects were erected, and still less where their owners may have come from originally.

⁵ For reconstruction of stela workshops in the Middle Kingdom, see e.g. Freed (1996), Marée (1993, 2010), and Ilin-Tomich (2011, 2017).

⁶ An example is Ikhernofret, who was commanded by Senusret III to travel south to Abydos to participate in the Mysteries of Osiris, and subsequently erected a stela to commemorate this event (Berlin 1204: e.g. Schäfer 1904; Simpson 1974, pl. 1; Lichtheim 1988, 98–100; Landgráfová 2011, 204–7). On travelling to Abydos, see further Baines (2007, esp. 18).

On the other hand, there are reasons to think that owners of monuments in the small corpus of attestations of the *smyt*-formula could be from several parts of Egypt. For example, no. 3 is dedicated to the scribe Sawadjet, whose name incorporates the goddess Wadjet, hence possibly indicating a northern origin. Although it is risky to ascribe monuments to a site solely on the basis of anthroponyms, these can sometimes be used as essential additional evidence to suggest a tentative provenance⁷.

Furthermore, the range of titles of the individuals depicted on the artefacts does not point to any link in status or profession. Two inscriptions feature individuals who could have taken part in expeditions. No. 9 is dedicated to a *t3w n hft-hr* (Ward 1982, no. 1573, “journeyman of the court”; see also Quirke 2004, 44–5, “bearer of (writing equipment and documents of) the Presence”), and the location of this graffito on the island of Konosso suggests that this official travelled south on royal business⁸. Moreover, a man referred to on no. 7 as *htmw hry-c n m-r htmt* (Quirke 2004, 53–4, “sealer and assistant to the treasurer”) is also attested in two graffiti in Wadi Magharah in Sinai (Gardiner, Peet, and Černý 1952, 68, no. 27, pl. 11; 69, no. 28, pl. 12; Franke 1984, dossier no. 508), hence suggesting the possibility of his direct or indirect involvement in an expedition there⁹. On their part, nos 3 and 6 mention men whose offices are related to the funerary cult, *wt* (Ward 1982, no. 754, “embalmer”) and *m-r is* (Ward 1982, no. 42, possibly “overseer of the tomb”) respectively. In addition, no. 1 depicts a holder of priestly offices that are not directly related to funerary duties, namely *m-r hmw-ntr* (Ward 1982, no. 259, “overseer of the god’s servants”). Diversity in titles and occupations in this corpus is remarkable, and some of these individuals – either ego or the people around him – are not characterised as members of a high elite. For instance, in no. 5 the stela owner himself holds the comparatively lower-status title *mdh* (Ward 1982, no. 812, “woodworker”).

In summary, the objects that feature the *smyt*-formula are heterogeneous in terms of artefact type, style, and social background of those presented. Whereas the formula is relatively consistent in its orthography and layout, no

⁷ For example, Franke (1993, 140) convincingly argues that names featuring the element *tjn* are likely to indicate a background in Elephantine, as Tjeni is the second name of Heqaib.

⁸ This graffito also mentions the god Khnum in the place of the offering formula often reserved to Osiris, thus rooting the inscription in Elephantine and possibly supporting the hypothesis of an expedition.

⁹ Stela no. 7 also has a reference to a man with the title *s n imy-h3t* (Ward 1982, no. 1235, possibly “pilot”), which could also be linked with an expedition.

Table 1: Sources featuring the *smyt*-formula

No	Object type	Museum number	Formula	Bibliography
1	Stela	Cairo CG 20057	<i>n k3 n [...] smyt nt pr it nt pr mwt</i>	Lange and Schäfer 1902a, 68–71; 1902c, pl. vi; PM v, 266
2	Stela	Cairo CG 20169	<i>smyt nt pr it pr mwt</i>	Lange and Schäfer 1902a, 200–1; 1902c, pl. xv
3	Stela	Cairo CG 20184	<i>smyt n pr it n pr mwt</i>	Lange and Schäfer 1902a, 213–4; 1902c, pl. xvi; Spiegel 1955, 321; PM v, 269
4	Stela with offering table	Cairo CG 20232	<i>n smyt nt pr it pr mwt</i>	Lange and Schäfer 1902a, 252–3; 1902c, pl. xviii; Handoussa 1985
5	Stela	Cairo CG 20268	<i>smyt nt pr it nt pr mwt</i>	Lange and Schäfer 1902a, 286
6	Stela	Cairo CG 20431	<i>smyt nt pr it smyt nt pr mwt</i>	Lange and Schäfer 1902b, 28–9; 1902c, pl. xxxi; PM viii.3, 121 [803-028-152]
7	Stela	Marseille 22	<i>smyt nt pr it [pr mwt]</i>	Maspero 1890, 113; Capart 1902, pl. 27; Nelson 1978, 56, no. 230; Meeks, Meeks, and Piérini 1996, 37; PM v, 102
8	Offering table	Vienna ÄS 98	<i>n k3 n smyt nt pr it mwt</i>	Brunner and Zick-Nissen 1984, no. 102; Satzinger 1987a, 96; 1987b, 102–3; Seipel 1993, no. 145. See also http://tinyurl.com/5s8mtpp (accessed 24 October 2016)
9	Graffito	Konosso island	<i>smyt nt pr it nt pr mwt</i>	Morgan 1894–1909, 73, n49; Petrie 1888, pl. 1, no. 24; PM v, 254

**Figure 1:** CG 20184. Lange and Schäfer 1902c, pl. xvi.**Figure 2:** CG 20431. Lange and Schäfer 1902c, pl. xxxi.

formal feature of the primary sources appears to provide a hint about its usage. I therefore look beyond the objects themselves, into the archaeological and social context of the evidence for the *smyt*-formula. In the following two sections I “deconstruct” the formula into its main constituents of *smyt* and *pr it / pr mwt* respectively and investigate their meanings and implications separately. These terms, as any other, would have had certain connotations in the minds of the ancient Egyptians, which might consequently have had an impact on any formula containing them. Thus, understanding those terms could provide the key to assessing the *smyt*-formula within its social context.

Setting the terms: *smyt* as a group of people

The word *smyt*, which is written with the desert determinative ☰, is widely acknowledged to mean “desert” and, in a more specific but related usage, “necropolis” (Wb 3, 444.8–445.13; see also TLA lemma 134780). The desert is associated with the realm of the dead in Egyptian imagery, so this identification is hardly unexpected. Scholars use both translations interchangeably, and indeed a connection between *smyt* and burial practices can be drawn from ancient sources. For instance, a set phrase attested dozens of times in the Old Kingdom refers to the Western desert (*smyt imnlt*) within the afterlife wishes of the deceased: *qrs.t=f m hrt-ntr m smyt imnlt*, “may he be buried in the necropolis in the Western desert” (lintel of entrance-doorway of the mastaba of Mereri in the Teti cemetery in Saqqara: Davies et al. 1984, pl. 4).

The *smyt* does not appear to be bounded to a specific site, as inscriptions incorporating the term are spread throughout Egypt. For example, the extremely fragmentary inscription of Senusret I at Tod mentions the *imiw [m] smyt-tn*, “those who are [in] this *smyt*” (Barbotin and Clère 1991, 10, cols 41–2, pl. 17a, 18c, fig. 3). A number of monuments, however, feature the term *smyt* in express connection with Abydos, including the well-known stelae of Wepwawet-aa (see below). In stela no. 1 of the *smyt*-formula corpus, an offering is performed *n k3 n smyt rsy(t) mhtt nt 3bdw*, “for the ka of the southern and northern *smyt* of Abydos”. The reference to cardinal directions in this and other examples confirms that the *smyt* is a place either physically or metaphorically.

Occasionally *smyt* can be made definite by means of a possessive suffix pronoun, indicating that it refers to a place that an individual can regard as his own. Thus, the stela of Montuwosre includes a self-presentation phrase

that reads: *ink qd pr wsh m niwt=f š3d is m smyt=f*, “I was one who built a wide house in his city and dug a tomb in his necropolis” (Florence 1774; Schiaparelli 1887, 489–90, pl. v.1; Varille 1934–1938; Landgráfová 2011, 268–9). The Leiden stela of Wepwawet-aa reinforces the connection between the *smyt* and the tomb (*is*), describing the location of the tomb of the stela owner as follows: *ir is-pn ir:n=i m smyt n t3-dsr m hry-ib itw*, “as for this tomb, which I made in the *smyt* of the sacred land, in the midst of the ancestors” (Leiden V4 = AP.63: Simpson 1974, pl. 30 [ANOC 20.1]; Lichtheim 1988, 75–7; Landgráfová 2011, 156–60). As on the lintel of Mereri cited above, this passage reveals connections between the *smyt* and the burial of the deceased. Here Wepwawet-aa’s tomb is located in the *smyt* of the necropolis (*t3-dsr*) rather than the necropolis (*hrt-ntr*) in the Western *smyt*. Depending on the context, *smyt* could be a general topographical denomination (i.e. desert), or an area within a necropolis where tombs were built.

On the basis of references to ancestors, some authors have proposed that *smyt* could designate a family tomb within a necropolis (Lange and Schäfer 1900, 110; see also Hannig 2006, 2194). In this sense, examples of *n k3 n smyt-tn*, “for the ka of this *smyt*” have been interpreted as referring to a multiple family burial whose members are remembered together (e.g. stela Liverpool M 13846, now lost: Gardiner and Sethe 1928, pl. 13; Gunn 1930, 155). A line on stela Cairo CG 20164 supports a connection between the *smyt*, ancestors, and Abydos, while making the key notion of remembrance explicit: *rdi.t sh3 n itw=f hr smyt nt 3bdw*, “a memorial was made for his ancestors in the *smyt* of Abydos” (Lange and Schäfer 1902a, 195–6; 1902c, pl. xiv).

While the *smyt* refers to a funerary place in many inscriptions, in other instances this meaning should be regarded as too constrained, since the context shows that the term could also encompass a group of people, as observed by Lange and Schäfer (1900). Stela Cairo CG 20536 adds a phrase that fits with this idea: *ir.n=[i] n3 n smyt-tn n-mrt rwd rn=sn sdm=[s]n s[dm]t it hft ir.t n=sn ht imy rn=f n smyt*, “[I] have done this for this *smyt*, so that their names endure, so that [th]ey hear what the ancestors h[ea]r when the rituals are carried out for them. List of the *smyt*” (Lange and Schäfer 1902b, 142–4; 1902c, pl. xxxix). Lange and Schäfer (1900, 110) analysed this example in detail, concluding that it could pertain to people who were buried together in a family tomb, and whose names are mentioned in the list that follows. I have shown that name lists are a common feature of monuments bearing the *smyt*-formula, but they may not necessarily indicate the physical presence of those individuals in a multiple tomb associated with the stela. Instead, the term could also be

a sign of absence, namely a way of ensuring that members of a group are remembered together with the stela owner irrespective of where they were buried.

A similar usage occurs on stela Heidelberg 560 (Feucht 1986, 58, fig. 165), where the owner intends to perpetuate the names – that is, the memory – of the people who make up his *smyt*: *im3hy ddw-hnmw s^cnh rnw nw smyt=f m 3bdw m m^c-hrw nb im3hw*, “the venerable Dedukhnum who makes the names of his *smyt* in Abydos live as justified and venerable ones”. It is striking that this example, in which the term so clearly refers to a group of people, is the only one with an additional house determinative □, hence anchoring that group of people to a place.

There are no examples known to me of *smyt* with the group of people determinative, although this may be due to the fact that there are already many human figures present in the composition, which would perhaps make it redundant (Fischer 1973, esp. 7). In the letter to the dead on the Qaw bowl¹⁰, the word *smyt* is followed by plural strokes | after the desert determinative, possibly conveying the notion of a group of people. This occurs in column 5 of the inside of the bowl, just after some actions concerning the proper burial of a relative are described: *qrs. n=i-sw in.n=i-sw m i[...] rdi.n[i]-sw m-m smyt=f*, “I buried him, I brought him from [...], [I] placed him among his *smyt*” (Gardiner and Sethe 1928, 3–5, pl. 19–21, pl. ii–iiia; Donnat Beauquier 2014, 35–41; Minciaci 2016).

These examples support Lange and Schäfer’s conclusion (1900) that in addition to the traditional meanings of *smyt* (“desert” and “necropolis”) it could refer to a particular type of monument with funerary functions and, by extension, to at least some of the people associated with that monument. Like other terms, *smyt* may have acquired additional meanings by metonymic extension, as with *pr* (discussed below).¹¹ Therefore, these renderings are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

In conclusion, the core meanings of *smyt* seem to be “desert” or “necropolis”, based on their frequency and on the writing of the word. All attestations of *smyt* feature the desert determinative, while the only orthographic indication of its referring to a group of people may be the plural strokes on the Qaw bowl. However, some passages in the inscriptions clearly indicate that the *smyt* is also a social grouping. The question remains to study the composition

of such a group and how it relates to the core meaning of *smyt* as necropolis or a part thereof. The suggestion of a family tomb may be tempting, although it is impossible to say whether all the people who are depicted on commemorative monuments were deceased when those were created or whether they were buried there at a later stage. In addition, most of the material comes from Abydos, where many individuals and kin groups commissioned memorials not as tombs but as a means of participating in the cult of Osiris eternally and of being remembered together as a group. I now turn to an analysis of the second part of the *smyt*-formula in order to shed some light on this social group.

Setting the terms: *pr it*, *pr mwt* and the separation of the paternal and maternal lines

The core meaning of *pr* itself is “house” and, among other connotations, it can also refer to possessions and people who make up the house, namely the “household” (Wb 1, 512.4, Faulkner 1962, 89; see also Willems 2015, 467–8). For this reason, the second constituents of the the *smyt*-formula – *pr it* and *pr mwt* – have been traditionally translated as “the house of the father” and “the house of the mother” respectively (Hannig 2006, 2194–5), or sometimes as “family” or “family line” (Franke 1983, esp. 276) in order to incorporate the notion of household¹². Yet that translation may pose analytical problems, since it is difficult to define what family meant in ancient Egypt.

The definition and functions of the family are sometimes taken for granted, assuming that our modern Western understanding may be universal. Kinship, however, is a culturally driven and socially contingent phenomenon and, as such, it needs to be defined within a particular context. There are at least twelve terms in ancient Egyptian – including *pr it* and *pr mwt* – that have been translated as family in the literature because they refer to some kind of kin group (Franke 1983, 178–302). Their usage varies, and their diverse contexts show that there are differences among them that do not map well onto the single term “family”. The use of just one rendering for several

¹⁰ This bowl was found in Qaw el-Kebir, which is incidentally the site with which nos 5 and 6 are associated.

¹¹ Among many other examples of places standing in for a community, see the self-presentation inscription of Djehutihotep at Dayr al-Barsha, where it was said that *nⁱwt dmd.t h^ct*, “the entire city rejoiced” at the sight of the colossal statue of the tomb owner (Newberry 1893, pl. xiv, col. 4).

¹² Hannig (2006, 897) translates *pr* as family when it is followed by a kin type with a suffix pronoun as a possessive (i.e. *pr it=f* and *pr mwt=f* as “the family of his father” and “the family of his mother” respectively). A similar remark is also made in Wb 1, 512.5–6. No attestation of these expressions with a genitival adjective *n* is known to me.

terms may be more revealing about the researchers' own preconceptions than about how the Egyptians understood these social groupings¹³.

A feature that is common to all Egyptian terms for kin groups is that they do not only encompass individuals who are biologically related, but also colleagues, subordinates, neighbours, or friends. All these people may be considered part of the household in the broadest sense. A paradigmatic example can be found in the early 12th dynasty documents of Heqanakhte, who addressed letters to his entire household (*pr*): *hn^c nd-hrt htpt hn^c prw r-dr=f hn^c nfst*, “and greetings to Hetepet and the whole household and Nefret” (letter i vso, line 16: Allen 2002, 16, pl. 9, 28). In addition, some of his documents include a register of the rations that should be given to people in the household (e.g. letter ii, line 7: Allen 2002, 16, pl. 10), and these list some relatives – such as his mother or his wife – as well as a number of dependants. Thus, as in the case of *smyt*, the *pr* is both a space and the elements (including people) that it contains. It is another example of how people make places as much as places make people.

In his analysis of Middle Kingdom kinship, Franke (1983, 275) noted that protagonists do not often mention their own *pr* in monumental inscriptions, but rather those of their father and mother. In just a few cases, such as the Heqanakhte papers, one's *pr* may be addressed. A comparable context is that of the Middle Kingdom letter of Nehsi at the British Museum (papyrus EA 10549: James 1962, 89–92, pl. 24–5, lines 4, 8, 9, vso 1), where the expression *pr=i* is also present. However, the usage of *pr* as a group of people is much more limited in other types of documentation, and no attestations of this term followed by a first person suffix pronoun are known to me outside the genre of personal letters.

This usage could reflect the nature of *pr* as a group, perhaps indicating that it is constructed in relation to people other than ego, in this case the father and the mother. The reason why *pr it* and *pr mwt* are usually mentioned as two separate spheres is not easy to assess beyond the fact that there was no ancient Egyptian word for “parents”. The absence of a term does not imply the absence of a concept, but the possibility should not be ruled out that the groups of the father's and the mother's line were conceptualised as distinct. Ideas around group formation are further explored in the next section.

A possibly related notion that also maintains a clearcut separation between paternal and maternal lines

¹³ These ideas will be treated in detail in a monograph currently in preparation (Olabarria forthcoming).

is that of inheritance¹⁴. For this reason, Franke (1983, 272–3) suggested that *pr* in some contexts could also be linked to sets of rights and duties in relation to the possessions of the father and of the mother. For example, the inscriptions in the 12th dynasty tomb of Djefaihapi I at Asyut specify that the property he can dispose of is what was handed down to him as patrimonial assets from his paternal line: *mk ht=i-pw nw pr it=i n ht is pw pr h3ty-c*, “look, it is my (own) property from the household of my father; it is not the property of the household of the nomarch” (tomb I: Griffith 1889, pl. 7, line 301).

Inheritance is a complex issue in itself, but it is noticeable from texts that the property of the father (*ht it*) and of the mother (*ht mwt*) are considered separately and may include people (Lüddekkens 1960, esp. 277; Pestman 1961, esp. 119–20; Eyre 1992, 219–20; Johnson 2015, 249–50, with table 2). The aforementioned stela of Montuwos-re, for example, confirms that groups of dependants could be transmitted from father to son by means of a deed of transfer: *ink spd hr hrp mrwt=f r iw hrw nfr n=i im=dd.n=i-st n s3=i m imyt-pr*, “I was one skilled in managing his dependants until the good day came for me concerning it, and I gave them to my son through a deed of transfer” (Florence 1774, line 7: Schiaparelli 1887, 489–90, pl. v.1; Varille 1934–1938; Landgráfová 2011, 268–9).

The *imyt-pr*, here translated as “deed of transfer”, has been discussed by a number of authors (e.g. Eyre 1992; Logan 2000; Lippert 2013, 5–6) as a legal document concerning disposal of property and inheritance¹⁵. Logan (2000, esp. 70–1) has convincingly argued that the use of *imyt-pr* in literary texts and self-presentation inscriptions has led to confusion about the functions of this document type. Analysis of legal texts indicates that the *imyt-pr* is used to document a transfer of property whose beneficiary would then be entitled to bequeath it. The expression *imyt-pr* can be rendered more literally as “that which is in the house”, making explicit this connection between possessions, inheritance, and the house/household¹⁶. The type of property that can be transferred by *imyt-pr* is not limited to movable assets and encompasses the household itself with its

¹⁴ On the relationship between kinship, descent, and transmission of wealth, see Willems (2015, 471–2).

¹⁵ On the notion of the *imyt-pr* as a written counterpart of a widespread “procès verbal”, see Eyre (2013, esp. 101–9).

¹⁶ A relationship between kinship, funerary duties, and inheritance has also been supported with sources from Deir el- Medina: “existing kinship ties, and part-taking in the burial arrangements and their expenses were apparently of crucial importance if one wished to inherit from the deceased, at least in cases where no explicit will was drawn up. In one text a reference was even made to a law of the Pharaoh: it is the one who buries who inherits” (Toivari-Viitala 2001, 103).

lands and dependants – as shown in the self-presentation text of Montuwoesre above – besides official titles (see list in Logan 2000, 68). This confirms the all-inclusive nature of *pr*, as well as its connection with property in general and patrimonial assets in particular.

Several phrases in self-presentation texts attest to a separation between paternal and maternal property, but one of the most eloquent sources in this respect is the early 12th dynasty stela of Antef, son of Mentuhotep at the British Museum (EA 1628; Franke 2007). Lines 11 to 15 of the inscription read as follows: *iw wn rmt nt it(=i) mn̄tw-htp m msw n pr m ht it=f m ht mwt=f iw wn rmt=i m-mitt m ht it=i m ht mwt=i m ht ds=i irt.n=i m gb=i*; “there were people of (my) father Mentuhotep as descendants of the household, from his father’s property and from his mother’s property, and there were likewise my people from my father’s property, from my mother’s property, and as my own property, whom I had acquired by my own arm” (for detailed analysis of this sentence, see Franke 2007, 160, textual note n). This passage alludes to a couple of ways in which people can be acquired. First, people may be transmitted down from one’s father and mother as described regarding both Antef himself and his father Mentuhotep before him. Second, Antef proudly states that he acquired more people himself, in keeping with the common *topos* of respect for the ancestors while surpassing them often found in self-presentation (Vernus 1995, 54–121; Olabarria 2014, 62–7). Indeed, the possibility of acquiring property from the father and the mother as well as through one’s own means is already present in the inscriptions of the 4th dynasty tomb of Metjen (Urk I, 2.8–17; Goedicke 1970, 6; Gödecken 1976). Logan (2000, 69–70) refers to these clarifications of the origin of possessions as the “history of the property”, which may appear both in legal and self-presentation texts to list the property that one can bequeath. The father’s and mother’s lines are distinguished in Antef’s inscription, but no difference either in status or composition is implied between them.

The examples presented show that the separation of the paternal and the maternal lines affected the composition of the group termed *pr*, which may have been constructed around ego’s ancestors. A similar distinction applies to the *smyt* in the context of the formula discussed in this article. If *smyt* is a group of people that could be related to ego in many ways and it involves the separation of parental lines that could include dependants, *smyt nt pr it* emerges as a group of people from within ego’s paternal line, while *smyt nt pr mwt* stems from the maternal line. Discrete analysis of the terms *smyt* and *pr* indicates that the setting of a necropolis – perhaps in connection with Abydos – on the one hand, and the notion of inheritance

of property and people on the other, could contribute to the interpretation of the *smyt*-formula.

Possible social implications of the *smyt*-formula

It is challenging to assess the social implications of a relatively rare formulaic phrase. However, it is clear that the *smyt*-formula addresses a social group of undetermined composition, possibly pointing towards a commemoration of family ties understood in a broad sense. In this section I propose that the *smyt*-formula can be interpreted as a rhetorical device to encourage memorialisation, as well as an allusion to the existence of ancestor-centric groups in ancient Egypt.

The function of the *smyt*-formula can be linked to the setting of a necropolis, despite the location of graffito no. 9 in a non-funerary context. In inscriptions, the term *smyt* appears in association with sites such as Abydos or Memphis, which indicates that it is not bounded to a specific place. However, sources from Abydos are particularly relevant due to their ubiquity in the Middle Kingdom archaeological record and their potential for illustration of social trends beyond a strict geographical location.

Stela British Museum EA 774 lists eighteen individuals and some of their filiations featuring the following phrase at the bottom: *smyt nt it nt mwt wd(t) r 3bdw*, “the *smyt* of the father and of the mother who proceed to Abydos” (Budge 1912, pl. 11). Even though only the parents are mentioned, and not their respective *pr*, the separation between the paternal and maternal line is maintained in this instance. The genealogical information provided by this stela is not easy to weave together, but it seems to have been dedicated by a man called Neni to both his father and namesake Neni and his mother Abetib. A few of the people depicted and/or mentioned on the monument appear to be genealogically related to ego, but his relationship with some others is not stated. The people of the *smyt* are said to proceed to Abydos, thus establishing that those groups would not need to be based at the site. Moreover, it does not necessarily imply that those people would have been buried at Abydos – which is what a rendering of *smyt* as family tomb would suggest – but they might have been required to travel there for some reason.

A late Middle Kingdom round-topped stela published by Clère (1985) hints at the possible duties of the *smyt* as

a group¹⁷. At the bottom of this stela are some columns of inscription listing a number of groups of people who do not all appear to be genealogically related to the stela owner. This list is preceded by the following sentence: *in rmt nbt smyt=ī q=sn r t' mch̄t nn q dʒ-ib nb r=s*, “all the people of my *smyt* are the ones who will enter this *mch̄t*, no impostor¹⁸ will enter it” (Clère 1985, 85, pl. xiii–xiv).

Clère rendered *mch̄t* as “chapelle funéraire”, but rather than referring to just funerary chapels it could also be employed for memorial chapels of the type found at Abydos (O’Connor 1985, 166). Hundreds of monuments, often clustered in memorial chapels, were set up along the processional route at Abydos leading from the temple of Osiris to Umm el-Qaab (Simpson 1974, 2–3; see also Kucharek 2006, 56–61; Effland and Effland 2010; Yamamoto 2015, 251–3). While there is archaeological evidence for burials in some cemeteries at Abydos (e.g. Richards 2005, 125–72), the area adjacent to the temple of Osiris seems to have been preferred for memorial chapels, and there is no conclusive evidence that most of these would have been associated with burials in that location¹⁹. The inscriptions mainly emphasise a desire to participate in the cult of Osiris at the site together with those who are represented and/or mentioned on the monuments. In this cultic context, the function of the *smyt* as a group could thus relate to memorialisation rather than to actual burial practices at Abydos. If this were the case, the translation of “family tomb” for the *smyt* can be nuanced, as it may not have been so relevant whether those mentioned on a monument were buried together. Rather, they may have been commemorated together within a given group, and might have had a duty to maintain that memory by visiting the monument and entering it, if appropriate, in case they travelled to Abydos.

Stela Durham N.1942 may support this interpretation of the *smyt*-formula (see Figure 3). This is a round-topped limestone stela of small dimensions (27 x 23 cm) with a regnal year in the lunette but no royal name given (Birch

¹⁷ This stela used to be in a private collection when Clère published it in 1985, but it was subsequently sold at an auction in November 2014 (<https://vimeo.com/110996767>; accessed 19 October 2016). I am grateful to Luigi Prada, who brought this auction to my attention. The stela is now part of the Museum of Fine Art collection in Boston, with accession number 2015.2159 (<http://tinyurl.com/hzbfkac>; accessed 14 December 2016).

¹⁸ The term *dʒ-ib* is a hapax, but it has been convincingly argued to mean “impostor” by Clère (1985, 85) based on the verb *dʒi*, “to be hostile” (Wb 5, 514.14–515.4).

¹⁹ For this reason, they are sometimes referred to as “cenotaphs”, although this term may be misleading because they may not have been built with the intention of echoing a tomb (Simpson 1980; O’Connor 1985).

1880, 276, pl. ii; Franke 1983, 219–20, 260; Satzinger and Stefanović 2012, 345)²⁰. Franke (1983, 220, n. 1) dated it to Amenemhat III or later on the basis of stylistic similarities with other dated sources.

The stela has a 21-column inscription featuring the names of people who were presumably related to the stela owner, but not in strictly genealogical terms. Columns 16–21 at the bottom read as follows: *rh.n=ī hm.n=ī sh̄.n=ī smh.n=ī bʒkt bʒk(=ī) s nb n hʒw pr īt pr mwt hnmsw=ī rmt=ī nbt*, “(those whom) I have known, (those whom) I have not known, (those whom) I have remembered, (those whom) I have forgotten, (my) female workers and male workers, every man of the *hʒw*, the *pr* of the father and the *pr* of the mother, my friends, all my people”. It is not clear whether *hʒw* and *pr* in this inscription are linked by means of an omitted genitival adjective (i.e. the *hʒw* of the *pr īt* and of the *pr mwt*) or whether they are independent – yet semantically related – elements in an enumeration. Be that as it may, the text introduces a link of the *pr īt* and *pr mwt* with other kin groups such as *hʒw*, and more broadly with other dependants exemplified by male and female workers. A *hʒw* is one of many types of social groupings attested in Middle Kingdom sources, and it appears to be used for a kin group that would have had some funerary duties towards the person whose *hʒw* is being mentioned (Franke 1983, 215–30; Olabarria 2014, 37–43). By analogy, it could be argued that the other groups listed in this inscription may have been involved in aspects of the funerary cult of ego, and thus in the maintenance of his memory.

This inscription also clearly mentions several groups of people that the stela owner wishes to have commemorated together with him. It is significant that he refers to absolutely everyone, including those whom he has forgotten to name. People whose names have been overlooked or are unknown are occasionally mentioned on other Middle Kingdom stelae (Spiegel 1955), but this Durham stela is a particularly eloquent example of the aspiration to be remembered with as large a group as possible. A further illustration of this trend occurs in stela no. 1 in the corpus presented for this article: *rh.n=ī nb hnms nb swr.n(=ī) wnm.n(=ī) hn̄c=f*, “all those I have known, every friend with whom (I) have drunk and with whom (I) have eaten”. A desire for memorialisation is often expressed in connection with the Mysteries of Osiris at Abydos (e.g. Müller 1933, 194; Simpson 1974, 10–3). For example, the aforementioned stela Cairo CG 20164 describes how a memorial (*sh̄*) was set up in honour of ego’s ancestors at Abydos.

²⁰ For more information about this stela, see the online database of the Oriental Museum in Durham: <http://tinyurl.com/zggxsrz> (accessed 14 October 2016).



Figure 3: N.1942. Reproduced by permission of Durham University Museums.

With the partial exception of source no. 1, the *smyt*-formula is always placed in the bottom area of the monument or inscription and after a list of names. This location may suggest that the formula either summarises all those people who have been mentioned elsewhere on the object or adds a few more people to the list, perhaps those for whose names space was insufficient but the commissioner was not prepared to leave out. Inscriptions such as that on the Durham stela favour the latter interpretation, especially since in the Middle Kingdom designs of stelae become progressively more inclusive (e.g. Vandier 1954, 495; Fitzenreiter 2005, 73).

Commemoration of those represented on stelae is an essential function of these monuments, as is especially evident in the context of Abydos. Appeals to the living, for example, engage the attention of the viewers and encourage interaction with the monuments with the explicit aim of sustaining the memory of the stela owner and his circle. The *smyt*-formula may have the same basic purpose and, in Andrew Jones' terms (2003, 69; see also Olabarria 2014, 134–43), it constituted a “technology of remembrance” that contributes to the materialisation and maintenance of social memory through inscriptions and representations on public monuments.

The composition of those groups that are commemorated, though, remains an open question. A genealogical analysis of Middle Kingdom monuments presents difficulties and methodological problems, such as the imprecision of kinship terms, the occasional ambiguity of filiation, or the lack of a clear referent for some suffix pronouns (Olabarria 2012, 881–8). Potential reconstructions of kin groups derived from stelae are therefore often uncertain²¹. For this reason and others, an exclusively genealogical connection of the *smyt* with the monument owner is difficult to postulate. For instance, stela no. 6 features a number of people whose relationship with the dedicatees may have been at the professional level: a few of the men mentioned on it share funerary offices, namely embalmers, a lector-priest, and an overseer of the tomb (see Figure 2). All these individuals are categorised as *sn*, which, although often translated as “brother”, has a much broader core meaning that could include colleagues or even subordinates (e.g. Franke 1983, 61–137). One of the two dedicatees of this stela featuring colleagues, Wahka, had another monument that focuses on commemorating his closest relatives instead, and does not mention the *smyt* (Cairo CG 20549: Lange and Schäfer 1902b, 177–9; Simpson 1974, pl. 41). In other cases, such as no. 7, a professional relationship is not evident, but a genealogical connection can be definitely excluded. The groups being commemorated here could have been brought together for a variety of reasons, with the *smyt* formula adding some kin to that list so that they are not forgotten.

Nonetheless, some cases lead to adopt a more nuanced standpoint. Stela UCL 14345 at the Petrie Museum bears a side inscription with an appeal to the living, asking them to perform an invocation offering: *n k3 n smyt n-ntr hr ‘b3 n nbwy kki [m3c-hrw?]*, “for the ka of the *smyt* that is upon the stela of the gold-worker Keki [justified?]” (Stewart 1976, 27–8, pl. 29.1). In this instance, those represented on the stela could be the *smyt* of the owner. Some names are difficult to decipher because the surface of this stela is quite worn, but most of them seem to be related genealogically to the stela owner. The same pattern is found on stela Heidelberg 560 (discussed above) where the names of the *smyt* are explicitly meant to be perpetuated, and all those depicted seem to be linked by filiation.

One could argue that these examples serve as evidence for the meaning of *smyt* rather than specifically the

²¹ A related methodological question is whether kinship diagrams are an adequate analytical tool for rendering Egyptian kin groups. Such genealogical trees are to a certain extent based on the Western paradigm that takes biology as the basis of kinship, but not every society shares this interpretation.

smyt-formula, but stela no. 2, which bears the *smyt*-formula, also presents a group of people for whom genealogical connections can be found: all those represented on this stela are connected through the mother's side, namely all are children of ego's mother or of ego's mother's mother. Despite this focus on the maternal side, the formula includes both *pr it* and *pr mwt*, thus intending to bring the paternal relatives into the equation.

It seems that the *smyt*-formula tends to be used primarily in contexts where colleagues rather than the closest relatives are the focus of memorialisation. One may wonder why the dedicatee's paternal and maternal *smyt* are mentioned on a monument that is generally aimed at commemorating colleagues or dependants. Ancient Egyptian groups appear to have been flexible and encompassing, so that they could include these non-genealogical relatives as part of ego's kin²², and the formula would contribute to articulating a broader dimension of ego's presentation of his social self. At the same time, the *smyt*-formula could also be indicative of a latent tension between ego-centred and ancestor-centred groups in ancient Egyptian society.

According to traditional studies of kinship classifications (e.g. Keesing 1975, 21–4), there exist groups constructed around a particular ego, while others take one or more ancestors as their point of departure. Both of these patterns can be identified in ancient Egyptian self-presentation. In the case of the *smyt*, instances such as stelae UCL 14345 and Heidelberg 560 could be considered as illustrations of ego-centred groups. By contrast, no. 2 appears to involve an ancestor-centred group that focused on ego's maternal line. Indeed, the reference to *pr it* and *pr mwt* – which could have been constructed around ego's ascendant lineage – within the formula indicates that a *smyt* could also be grounded on one's ancestors. The *smyt*-formula could be locating ego at the centre of an intersection between the paternal and maternal lines, which are embodied on the possessions and social relationships that are handed down to him, while at the same time reaffirming his social persona as focus of his own ego-centred kin group.

Final remarks

In this article I have discussed how a formulaic expression can shed light upon issues concerning kinship, group formation, memory, and the composition of the social

fabric of ancient Egypt. I have analysed its components separately in order to elucidate how their discrete meanings contribute to creating a subtle and complex phrase that, as a whole, provides information on Egyptian social structure. The *smyt*-formula has proven to be an elusive composition of the late Middle Kingdom, with only nine attestations known to date. While the sources are heterogeneous, the formula is markedly consistent, tending to appear at the end of a list of names. This connection with personal names is indicative of its potential as a source for the analysis of social dynamics in ancient Egypt.

While the term *smyt* can often be rendered as “desert” or “necropolis”, the examples discussed above show that in some contexts it refers to a group of people. From the sources it seems that an ego could have at least two *smyt*-groups, one from the paternal and one from the maternal line, reflecting two distinct spheres of inheritance that are epitomised in the separation of those two lines. One's *pr it* and *pr mwt* also may include those people (relatives, dependants, colleagues, and even friends) in relation to whom one had certain rights and duties.

A possible interpretation is that the *smyt*-formula could reinforce the social persona of ego at the intersection between the paternal and maternal lines, which are kept separate, yet related. In this sense, the use of both *pr it* and *pr mwt* may hint at how ego's relations and possessions are essential to his self-presentation and memorialisation. The *smyt*-formula is thus acting as a “technology of remembrance” that helps to maintain the memory of ego while increasing the number of people together with whom he is commemorated.

The *smyt*-formula can be understood as an embodiment of a subtly evoked tension between ego-centred and ancestor-centred groups in ancient Egyptian society. Some strategies of group formation take ego as their point of departure, while others focus on his or her predecessors, but both approaches seem to be necessary for a complete characterisation of an individual's identity within his or her group.

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²² The aforementioned inclusiveness in the usage of the kinship term *sn* is illustrative of this trend.

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