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# Get thee behind me, City God!

## New Kingdom versions of the so-called “Saite Formula”

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**Summary:** The most recent analysis of the Saite Formula by K. Jansen-Winkeln (2000), based on an exhaustive corpus of over 200 examples, concluded that it was essentially a dedication formula expressed in the passive voice, commemorating the proper sacralization of the statue. Two previously unrecognized examples, both from Nubia during the late Eighteenth Dynasty, show that the supposed passive verbal form must be understood as the imperative of *rdj*, “to place”, written in its archaizing or abbreviated non-suppletive form. This calls for a new analysis of the religious meaning of the formula, restoring agency to both the dedicant and his protective City God.

**Keywords:** Dendera – Gebel Barkal – imperative – Osiris – Semna – statue cult – text Saite Formula

## 1 Introduction

Variations of the so-called “Saite formula” occur on private monuments from the New Kingdom until the Ptolemaic Period, but its ubiquity on Twenty-Sixth dynasty statues inspired its unshakeable misnomer. The statue British Museum EA 1197 provides a typical example from the Late Period<sup>1</sup>:



Although this concise formula appears with great frequency, numerous textual uncertainties obscure its original message. Since both the human dedicant and his local city-god are mentioned at the beginning, subsequent uses of the third person singular suffix-pronoun (=f) are ambiguous.

Translators have interpreted this formula in various ways over the years, but in the late 1990’s, two scholars reexamined the question. First, Herman De Meulenaere

(1995–96) published a deceptively short article in which he assembled copious sources – eschewing superfluous, repetitive examples in favor of the rarer, potentially diagnostic variants – and pronounced definitive judgments on each section of the formula. Several years later, Karl Jansen-Winkeln (2000) expanded De Meulenaere’s corpus by tabulating all attestations known to him at the time – 233 in total – and meticulously examined every word.

After these exhaustive studies, Jansen-Winkeln’s translation has been generally followed<sup>2</sup>, with very few exceptions<sup>3</sup>. Nonetheless, despite the great diversity of sources consulted in these erudite studies, newly discovered or previously overlooked examples could always modify the conclusions, especially since most of the Late Period references cited are equally ambiguous. In particular, two New Kingdom forerunners of the ubiquitous Saite Formula contain small differences that suggest an entirely different interpretation of the formula.

De Meulenaere (1995–96, 84) recognized the potential importance of certain Eighteenth Dynasty texts (*cf. infra*, examples **M** and **T**) for understanding the later versions, at least for sorting out the suffix pronouns. Jansen-Winkeln (2000, 101), meanwhile, dismissed those attestations as isolated, experimental formulations:

Beiden Varianten stammen übrigens aus der 18. Dynastie, sicher nicht zufällig, denn in dieser Zeit war der Text wohl noch nicht zur Formel erstarrt (...) sicher ist aber, daß anhand dieser beiden ganz vereinzelt Belege nicht die Saitische Formel insgesamt beurteilt werden kann<sup>4</sup>.

Neither scholar, however, mentioned the following Eighteenth Dynasty examples from Nubia, both published years ago by Dows Dunham, albeit with little textual

<sup>1</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 2000, 123, Nr. 168

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Coulon 2001, 142, n. m; Payraudeau 2006, 249, n. 7; Perdu 2011, 156, 165, 172.



<sup>3</sup> E.g. Goyon, Cardin 2004, 95, 105–106: “daigne te placer derrière lui”; Ramadan 2004, 75, 83, n. 11: “(Ô) Dieu local (...) place-toi derrière lui.”

<sup>4</sup> Earlier in the same article, Jansen-Winkeln (2000, 85, n. 25) noted these two examples “sind (...) strenggenommen nicht einmal Belege der Formel selbst, sondern in der 1. Person formulierte Texte, die nur die gleichen Elemente enthalten wie die Formel.” For the theological interpretation of this formula, this seems to be a distinction without a difference.

commentary. These attestations confirm that the formula was thematically consistent already in the New Kingdom, even if it had not yet frozen into its Late Period template. More importantly, the peculiar formulation of these early texts demands a different interpretation of the verbal form used, leading to a re-evaluation of the expression in all periods, its theological import, and its diachronic development.

## 2 The Verbal Form

Identifying the correct verbal form is crucial to understanding the whole formula. Out of the 233 examples Jansen-Winkeln collected, the most frequent spellings, representing about half of the corpus, are the following<sup>5</sup>:

 and variants (x 69)  
 and variants (x 48)

This verb usually follows a reference to the city god (*ntr-niwtj*), quite often referred to as “the city god of NN, son of NN, born of NN.” Prior to the systematic studies mentioned above, translators were split between two significantly different interpretations<sup>6</sup>:

1. Vocative + imperative: “O City God of NN, place yourself behind him/her!”
2. Passive *sdm.tw=f* with honorific transposition: “The City God of NN is placed behind him/her.”

The second, passive option would be highly ambiguous, as *sdm.tw=f* could represent a passive in the nominal, subjunctive, or prospective conjugations. Moreover, this interpretation requires preposing the object (“the City God”) before the verb and passive marker (*tw*) using honorific transposition, quite remarkable for a conjugated *sdm.tw=f*. Finally, the element “NN” often comprises many titles and affiliations, so that the proposed transposition leaps over several columns, requiring incredibly acrobatic scanning by the reader (Fig. 1). First one must leap over *ntr-niwtj*, the names and titles of all people mentioned until reaching the verb (1); the reader next springs back to the beginning of the text for the subject (2); finally, one bypasses the signs read previously to conclude with the positional phrase (3).

<sup>5</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 2000, 90. For the present figures, the variant spellings of the element *tw/tj/tl* are not distinguished; cf. also De Meulenaere 1995–96, 82–83.

<sup>6</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 2000, 90, nn. 57–59

From a functional perspective, this proposed reading path is tortuous at best. Syntactically, postponing the verb so far past the subject, sometimes multiple columns, is difficult to accept for a *sdm.tw=f* form. Honorific transposition often produces complex graphic arrangements, sometimes involving verbal forms, but such extended leaps are not otherwise attested in Egyptian<sup>7</sup>.



**1** *di.t(w)*      **2** *ntr-niwtj n NN*      **3** *h3=f*

**Figure 1:** Mapping of hypothetical reading order, assuming *sdm.tw=f* with honorific transposition. JE 37851, Back Pillar (modified from Payraudeau 2006, 250).

If the passive option is preferred, one could achieve a similar translation by parsing *dd.tw* as a stative, employing the invariable *tw*-ending common in both Late Egyptian and *l'égyptien de tradition*<sup>8</sup>. Jansen-Winkeln (2000, 90) admitted this possibility, noting it might be a later development. Yet while this interpretation would explain most of the later attestations, particularly those without a *tw*-ending or pronoun, it would hardly be appropriate for the Eighteenth Dynasty examples, since the *tw*-ending first occurs for the third person masculine in the Nineteenth Dynasty, when it only appears in special cases<sup>9</sup>.

The imperative, meanwhile, would make sense logically, but the morphological variants of the verb (*(r)dj*) appear more appropriate for *sdm=f* conjugations, not the

<sup>7</sup> Peust 2007, 118–124.

<sup>8</sup> Winand 1992, 107–108, § 199; Kurth 2008–9, II, 724–728, § 140; Engsheden 2003, 215–223; Sargent 2004, 42, n. 94, 297, n. 137.

<sup>9</sup> Winand 1992, 112–114, 145, 149.

expected imperative (*imy*). Consequently, Jansen-Winkeln emphatically stated (2000, 90–91)<sup>10</sup>:

Nach diesen Schreibungen ist es eindeutig, daß ein Imperativ *jmj tw* „begib dich“ nicht in Frage kommt (...) Der Imperativ *jmj is* demgegenüber unter all den Varianten *kein einziges Mal* vortreten.

Nonetheless, several counterexamples speak against this interpretation. On a Late Period statue in Cairo (CG 665), the verb is written with prothetic yod (𓄏𓄏𓄏), difficult to reconcile with any *sdm.tw=f* forms or the stative<sup>11</sup>. Stranger still is the variant 𓄏𓄏𓄏 (CG 1202), a statue of the erudite lector priest Padiamenope.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, other examples address the deity with an *active*, subjunctive *sdm=f* (i.e. *dī=k tw ḥ3=f*, “may you place yourself behind him”), ascribing agency to the City God himself.<sup>13</sup>

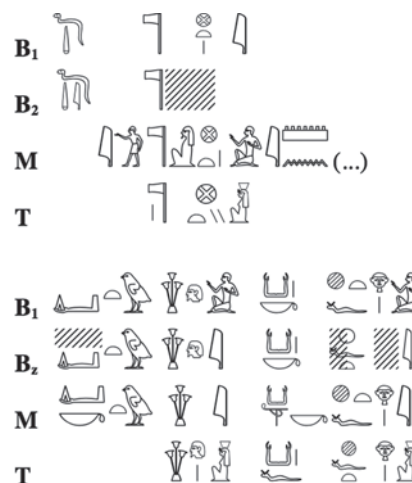
## New Kingdom Examples

Additional evidence comes from two New Kingdom private monuments from Nubia – not mentioned by De Meulenaere or Jansen-Winkeln – both excavated by Reisner and currently housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The first statuette ( $B_1$  = MFA 24.743) was found in the foundations of Taharqa’s temple at Semna, and almost certainly dates to the reign of Amenhotep III.<sup>14</sup> It belonged to a Deputy of Wawat named Djehutymose, whose name was spelled enigmatically as: 𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏 (*Dḥwti-ms < Dḥwti-m-s3*)<sup>15</sup>. Although most of the inscriptions are cryptographic,

the back pillar features a version of the Saite formula composed in *Klarschrift*.<sup>16</sup> (Dunham and Janssen 1960: 33, Pl. 89c).

The second statuette, preserved in multiple fragments ( $B_2$  = MFA 16-3-37 + 19-1-240 + 19-1-339), belonged to a Viceroy of Kush who was also named Djehutymose<sup>17</sup>, certainly the same Viceroy known to have served under Akhenaten. Since this object mentions Ptah, Anubis, and Sokar in the offering formula, and since it was later smashed into many fragments, one may date it to late in the reign of Amenhotep III or very early Amenhotep IV. It might belong to the owner of the Semna statuette, but the cryptographic name on the former statue prevents a positive identification. In addition to the offering text on the side, another version of the Saite formula occurs on the back pillar<sup>18</sup>.

To these examples one may compare a contemporaneous statue of Minemhab from Hermopolis, now in Cleveland 1996.28 (M)<sup>19</sup>, and a slightly earlier statue of queen Tiya (T), wife of Amenhotep II<sup>20</sup>, both already mentioned by De Meulenaere and Jansen-Winkeln.



$B_1, B_2$ : *dd-mdw (i) ntr ntw.ty=i imi/di tw ḥ3=i*  
*k3=k ḥft-hr=i*

“Recitation: ‘O my City God, place yourself behind me, (while) your Ka is in front of me!’”

<sup>10</sup> Similarly De Meulenaere 1995–96, 83: “L’absence totale d’une orthographe claire de l’impératif *imy* et la réduplication occasionnelle *dī(di)* fournissent, à elles seules, une réponse adéquate au problème posé.”

<sup>11</sup> Jansen-Winkeln dismissed this example as anomalous (2000, 90, Nr. 53).

<sup>12</sup> Jansen-Winkeln suggested this text might rely on semantic overlap between the verbs *iri* and *rdi*, or perhaps a copying error (2000, 90–91).

<sup>13</sup> Jansen-Winkeln omitted these contradictory spellings from his quantitative table (2000, 90–91, with n. 63), discussing them separately (2000, 100–101); De Meulenaere also mentioned several examples of this variant, and even noted that they would appear to support an imperative translation, but then concluded in favor of the passive interpretation (1995–96, 83).

<sup>14</sup> Dunham and Janssen 1960, 33–42, Pl. 89a–e. Klotz and Brown 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Compare the similar cryptographic orthographies of Minmose (spelled: *Mnw-m-s3*) from the Nineteenth Dynasty: Bryan 1986, 20; U. Effland and A. Effland 2004, 11–12, 14; to their examples, add JE 37367 (unpublished; <http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/?id=924>). For this arm writing *m*, cf. *infra*. n. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Dunham and Janssen 1960, 33, Pl. 89c.

<sup>17</sup> Dunham 1970, 28 (10), 31, Fig. 25, Pl. XXVIII; Haynes 2011, 45. Dunham did not correctly recognize the sign before *ms*, but collation confirms that this sign is a seated, ibis-headed Thoth, as noted already by Goedicke 1972, 89. An identical spelling of the Viceroy Djehutymose occurs on his other statue from Gebel Barkal (MFA 16.476), which likewise predates Akhenaten’s proscription against Amun; Dunham 1970, 21 (8), 30, Fig. 23, Front, Pl. XXVII.

<sup>18</sup> Dunham 1970, 30, Pl. XXVII; Klotz and Brown 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Kozloff and Bryan 1992, 246; Berman 1999, 234.

<sup>20</sup> Zivie-Coche 1985, 397, Pl. II, B, col. x+2.

**M:** *i ntr-niw.ty=i Imn (...) di=k tw h3=i*  
*k3=k hft-hr=i*

“O my City God, Amun (...) place yourself behind me,(while) your Ka is in front of me!”

**T:** *ntr-niwty=i h3=i k3=f hft-hr=i*

“My City God is behind me, (while) his Ka is in front of me.”

Unlike the Late Period exemplars, all four versions are composed in the first person singular. In the first three texts, the dedicant addresses the city-god in the second person singular (in **M**, the text is introduced by *dd=f*, “he (Minemhab) says”); Tiya refers to him in the third person. Minemhab employs a hortatory *sdm=f* followed by the direct object pronoun: “O my city-god, Amun (...) may you place yourself (*di=k tw*) behind me!”

In the two Nubian examples (B<sub>1</sub>–B<sub>2</sub>), a passive *sdm.tw=f* with honorific transposition is impossible (i.e. “my city god has been placed behind me”), since the speaker immediately refers to “your Ka (*k3=k*)”<sup>21</sup>. The ending (ⲁ ⲛ) cannot represent the second person stative of the Late Period, since these examples date to the reigns of Amenhotep III and early Akhenaten. Instead, comparison with the Minemhab text indicates that both Nubian statues employ the imperative form of the verb, thus: *di tw*, “put yourself!”

De Meulenaere and Jansen-Winkeln both observed that a morphologically unambiguous imperative form never occurs in the Saite formula. While the same observation applies to the present texts, the syntax dictates an imperative translation. Neither scholar mentioned that the relevant signs (ⲁⲛ and ⲁⲛ) are also standard spellings for the imperative of *rdi*, “to give,” in Old Egyptian<sup>22</sup>. Afterwards they serve the same function in Middle Kingdom religious texts<sup>23</sup>, quite frequently in New Kingdom netherworld books<sup>24</sup>, and sporadically thereafter through the Ptolemaic Period<sup>25</sup>.

The precise transliteration of these variants is uncertain, whether *di* or *imy*<sup>26</sup>. On the one hand, the first sign (ⲁⲛ) often interchanges with similar arms (ⲁⲛ, ⲁⲛ, or ⲁⲛ),

<sup>21</sup> One could arguably suggest reading: *di(i) tw h3=i*, “(I) place you behind me.” However, the first person suffix pronoun is explicitly marked in the every other instance on the Semna statuette (**B<sub>1</sub>**).

<sup>22</sup> Wb. I, 76, 14; Grapow 1941, 27; Edel 1955–64, §607–608; Allen 1984, §180, 183. This form of the imperative was recently discussed with many examples by Werning 2013, 243 (kindly noted to the author by Andréas Stauder).

<sup>23</sup> Winter 1968, 175–176; Van der Molen 2000, 831–836.

<sup>24</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 2012, 90; Werning 2011, I, 158, §78, n. 189; 2013: 243.

<sup>25</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 1985, I, 76, n. 47; Kurth 2008–9, I, 174.

<sup>26</sup> Most scholars prefer to transcribe *di*: e.g. Gardiner 1957, §336; Werning 2013, 243.

thus obtaining the phonetic values *m*, *mi*, and *im*<sup>27</sup>, just as in the enigmatic spelling of the personal name Djehutymose at Semna (B<sub>1</sub>). On the other hand, Demotic and Coptic (Sahidic) employ both the suppletive form (*my*, ⲙⲁ) and the non-suppletive (infinitive) form (*ti*, ⲧ) for the imperative of *rdi*<sup>28</sup>, suggesting a similar division may have existed in earlier phases of the language. Indeed, in the finger counting Spell 397 of the Coffin Texts (CT V, 1151, 116e), the imperative of *rdi* (spelled: ⲁⲛ and ⲁⲛ) forms a pun with the number *diw*, “five,” suggesting it was already pronounced like *di*<sup>29</sup>.

In the very concise “Saite formula”, scribes may have preferred these logographic forms over traditional but less economical writings (e.g. ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁ). Or perhaps dialectical or syntactic traditions may have privileged the non-suppletive imperative *di*. Whatever the motivation, ancient readers could have recognized the grammatic function of the verb from the syntax, particularly in the early examples from Semna and Gebel Barkal.

## Late Period Examples







Moving to the Late Period, the numerous references De Meulenaere and Jansen-Winkeln gathered to bolster their interpretations (stative or passive *sdm.tw=f*), could conversely support the opposite view. As we have just seen, the two most common forms (ⲁⲛ, ⲁⲛ) representing 117 out of 233 examples, can both write the imperative in all stages of Egyptian. This solution would also explain the anomalous form on CG 665 (ⲛⲁⲛⲁ), since comparable spellings of the imperative with prothetic *yod* occur in the Pyramid Texts<sup>30</sup>. For the singular variant from CG 1202 (ⲁⲛⲁⲛ),

<sup>27</sup> The *di*-arm writes *m* in non-cryptographic texts of Dynasty 18 (e.g. Urk. IV, 1845, 17, and 1847, 10; Varille 1940, Pl. 65), quite regularly in topographic lists and other loanwords (Hoch 1994, 508; Schneider 1992, 377). For more examples, see Bomhard 2012, 62, n. e; Jansen-Winkeln 1996, 11, §7; Winter 1968, 175–176; Kurth 2008–9, I, 324, 336, nn. 324–325; Klotz 2011, 483. The simple arm can also write *m* or *im* (Darnell 2004, 592; Werning 2008, 139).

<sup>28</sup> In Demotic and Coptic, the choice of imperative form appears to depend on the indirect object of the verb: Johnson 1976, 20–21, with n. 93.











<sup>29</sup> See Loprieno 2000, 20, who suggested this was “presumably another instance of pun involving the written, rather than the spoken sphere.” Cf. also Kammerzell 1994, 178–179. In the related Spell 396 (CT V, 73h), meanwhile, a pun is formed between the number five and the verb *wd*, “to place.”



<sup>30</sup> An identical orthography is attested in Pyr. 392b (W, T, N); examples with the *di*-arm (D37) are much more common (Allen 1984, §180).

the eye could have the phonetic value  $m^3$ ,<sup>31</sup> accurately recording the contemporary pronunciation of the imperative *my*, “give!” (cf. Late Egyptian:   ; Ptolemaic:   ; Demotic: *my*; Coptic:  $\text{MA}, \text{MOI}, \text{MAI}$ ).<sup>32</sup>









## Complications

Occurring considerably more rarely are verbal forms that would seem to favor a passive or stative translation. Jansen-Winkeln was certainly right to assume the formula had changed over the centuries, since ancient Egyptian readers and scribes – much like modern Egyptologists – could have understood the ambiguous Saite formula in different ways. Nonetheless, one may still interpret most of the remaining Late Period attestations as imperatives, despite the unconventional orthographies.











Geminating forms (e.g.   ,   ,   ) are quantitatively uncommon (12/233 examples). Given their rarity, these may be sportive writings of the imperative, employing the very same false-dual principle commonly used to write the preceding nisbe, *ntr-niwtj*, “City-god” (). That is:  $m^i + m^i = (i)my$ , or instead  $d + d = di$ , “give!”







Another variant appears not to write the expected *tw* at all (; 22/233 examples). Since those attestations date to the Thirtieth Dynasty<sup>33</sup>, they might also employ graphic puns common to the era, exploiting two different phonetic values of the same arm, namely: *imy* and *tw* ( $< di$ ) = *imy tw*, “place yourself!” A comparable sportive writing of the word *mdw*, “speech,” occurs in the Naukratis Stela, col. 5:  ( $md(w) < (i)my + di$ )<sup>34</sup>.

There are several examples which exhibit no *t(w)* or *t(i)* element, but end simply in  $-w$  or  $-y$ . De Meulenaere (1995–96: 84) cited such variants to confirm his thesis, noting that they “ne peuvent être interprétées autrement que comme des passifs en .w.” Jansen-Winkeln (2000: 90) counted eight such cases, but three of these are debatable (using Jansen-Winkelns numbering):

n° 74 (CG 42235):   (incorrectly published as:  )<sup>35</sup>  
n° 59 (CG 941):    
n° 82 (CG 42246):  

The first example was based on an incorrect copy, while the latter two can easily be explained as imperatives followed by *t(w)* and *tw*. This still leaves six potential exceptions:

n° 198 (Louvre E 10481)<sup>36</sup>:  n° 218 (Vienna, KhM ÄS 9639):    
n° 47 (Havana, Inv. 73):  n° 182 (MMA 07.228.27):    
n° 30 (Belgian collection):   n° 185 (MMA 24.2.2):  

For the Vienna example Satzinger (1996, 260, 263, n. k) suggested making a minor emendation ( $*\text{m}^i\text{y}$ ), and the same is possible for n°s 30 and 182; similarly, one could argue restoring a small *t(w)* to n°s 198 and 47. The final example (MMA 24.2.2) could be an engraving error for similar forms such as:   (multiple examples),   (n° 189), and   (n° 53).

Finally, several examples omit the verb *rdi* altogether<sup>37</sup>. Those versions might be read as a observational statements (i.e. “the City God is behind him”), similar in basic meaning to the passive form. Yet an initial adverbial phrase could also express a wish (i.e. “(May) the City God be behind him!”), with an understood imperative<sup>38</sup>. One might compare, *inter alia*, the reduction of a frequent appeal to divinities (“Turn your face to me! (*imy hr=k n=i*)”) to an initial adverbial phrase (“(May) your face be towards me! (*hr=k n=i*)”) on other statues<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Klotz 2012, 140, n. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Winand 1992, 174–176; Jansen-Winkeln 1996, 73, § 116; Engsheden 2003, 84; Kurth 2008–9, II, 753; CDD M, 52; Crum, CD 155b, 392b; Layton 2004, § 366–367.

<sup>33</sup> De Meulenaere 1995–96, 63–64

<sup>34</sup> Bomhard 2012, 66–67, n. h.

<sup>35</sup> Legrain 1914, 84; mistake reproduced in JWIS III, 448 (52.184); see photograph NU\_2009\_0188 on the Karnak Cachette database (<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/?id=202>).

<sup>36</sup> Recently published by Perdu 2012, 244.

<sup>37</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 2000, 98–99; cf. supra, for example (T) from the New Kingdom.

<sup>38</sup> Jansen-Winkeln already noted this as a possibility (2000, 91), but argued “inhaltlich wäre in einer derartigen Formel eine konstatierende Form wohl passender als eine optativische.”

<sup>39</sup> Jansen-Winkeln 2001, 204, n. 10; to whose examples add the Ptolemaic statues Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 48.24.8, left side, line 6, and Philadelphia, Rosenbach Library 1954, 1969, line 2: Klotz 2015; 2016, 442, n. d.

### 3 Summary

With the enormous number of attestations for the “Saite formula,” no single translation can suffice for all the variants, as some scholars have already observed (e.g. Bakry 1970, 25). As noted above, certain examples clearly employ subjunctive *sdm=f* forms, while others omit the verb altogether. Even the standardized, Late Period formulations could have been understood differently by readers in various regions at different times.

What the Nubian examples discussed above bring to light is that at least certain Egyptians in the New Kingdom understood the phrase as an imperative, and believed this verbal form was intelligible in the less common, possibly archaizing, non-suppletive form. This evidence suggests the same interpretation is valid for the majority of extant cases from the Late Period, since the verb is spelled the same way. Whether the same translation is compatible with the much more rarely occurring reduplicated forms and other variants is debatable, but not *a priori* impossible.

#### 3.1 Theological Significance of the Formula

For Jansen-Winkeln, the passive forms (whether *sdm.tw=f* or stative) identify this text as a dedication formula, similar to the older: *di.w m hzw.t*, “given through the blessings (of the King)”. Moreover, since the text very often occurs on back pillars of statues, he argued that the formula refers specifically to the privilege of receiving a statue with a back pillar. This “support” identified the deceased as a “pillar (*Twny*)”, ensuring his protection by the city god. Somehow the back pillar was identified with the City god, or at least served as a temporary *Aufenthaltort* for him (Jansen-Winkeln, 2000, 98, 103–106)

Besides the grammatical objections discussed above, Jansen-Winkeln’s interpretation presents an important theological conundrum. Namely, who was deemed capable of placing the City God behind the human figure? Understood in the passive, as a dedication remark, the Saite formula suggests the officiating or priest or even the sculptors held this privilege. By inscribing the performative label on the back pillar, they would have compelled the City God to permanently inhabit the statue and protect the dedicant.

Yet if one understands the verb in the imperative, agency is restored to the City God. Granted, the speaker still commands the divinity – just as magicians could threaten the entire pantheon with calamities, and pious devotees might beseech a god to “turn his face” to them –

but the City God alone chooses whether to protect the dedicant.

Furthermore, the passive interpretation implies that the City God is perpetually contained within the back pillar, offering continuous protection. While such a wish would seem quite reasonable, it does not correspond to known cult practices involving private statuary in temples. Instead, as Jansen-Winkeln already theorized regarding some of the early Eighteenth Dynasty variants (2000, 101):

Vielmehr könnte *k3.f* (bzw. *k3.k*) *hft-hr.j* auf den Akt der „Weiheung“ der Statue anspielen: Vielleicht geschah dies in einer Zeremonie, bei der der Gott (bzw. sein Kultbild oder seine Barke) vor der Statue haltmachte. Das ist natürlich spekulativ.

Jansen-Winkeln assumed the god (or his divine statue) was in front of the private statue for a dedication ceremony only, perhaps as part of the Opening of the Mouth ritual (2000, 103–106).

Yet it is equally conceivable that the formula alludes to repeated occasions, such as bark processions, when the divinity would traverse the temple, passing by numerous private statues while priests in his retinue recited prayers and gave offerings of incense, flowers, and food, to distinguished sculptures. The so-called Saite formula employs an imperative because the dedicant essentially demands the City God stop as he passes by. Moreover, the ephemeral nature of this divine encounter explains why the text adds the circumstantial, adverbial clause: “while your Ka is in front of me.” Thus in the New Kingdom, one might annotate the text as follows:

“O my City God, place yourself (spiritually) around me (viz. my statue),  
while your Ka (viz. your statue)  
is (physically) in front of me (viz. my statue).”

For later texts, the suffix pronouns change to the third person singular, possibly signaling a shift in the relation between gods and private statues. In the New Kingdom versions, the Ka belongs to the City God, but the Late Period examples refer to the dedicant’s Ka. If one assumes this new Ka is a statue of the deceased, in front of whom (*m-b3h=f*) is the statue standing?

Since the third-person suffix pronoun can hardly refer to the City God, who is still addressed in the second person singular, it must be the deceased himself, or more properly his Ba traveling within the City God’s retinue (*šmsw; imy.w-hl*). The Late Period variants thus appear to evoke a reunion of the dedicant’s Ba (spirit) with his Ka (statue), apparently during a bark procession of the City God. This divinity is requested to join in and bless the deceased with

his protection. One might paraphrase the Late Period versions as follows:

“O City God of NN, place yourself (spiritually) around him (viz. NN’s Ba),  
while his Ka (viz. NN’s statue)  
is (physically) in front of him (viz. NN’s Ba).”

For the Late Period examples, the third person suffix pronoun occurs several times in the formula. Jansen-Winkeln argued that both examples refer to the dedicant, so that the City God is behind *him*, in front of *his* Ka, and in *his* presence.

### 3.2 The City God and the Iuny

Neither of the New Kingdom statues from Nubia shed light on the identity of the two divinities mentioned in the full formula: the City God (*ntr-niwtj*) and the entity referred to as Iuny (*Iwny*). Nonetheless, the precise meaning of these terms is crucial to any interpretation, and thus merits another view.

Most examples of the formula conclude with an enigmatic statement, apparently intended to motivate the City God to protect the statue: “He is a Iuny (*Iwny pw*).” Jansen-Winkeln (2000, 94–96) argued the term *iwny* somehow referred to the back pillar of the statue (< *iwn*, “pillar”). After the statue underwent the proper rituals (e.g. Opening of the Mouth), the subject would be equipped with a sanctioned back pillar (thus: “er ist ein mit einem (solchen) Pfeiler versehener”) enabling the City God to dwell there behind him as protection.

Yet if the statue is truly conceived as a fixed stone pillar, it is unclear why so many examples express the wish to move around freely (*ni d3.tw rd.wy=fy*, “his feet shall not be hindered”). Moreover, Jansen-Winkeln already acknowledged two potential objections to this theory. First, the Saite formula sometimes occurs on several statues *without* back pillars (Jansen-Winkeln 2000, 87, 98, n. 114). Furthermore, the mysterious term *Iwny* is never determined with the usual classifiers for pillars (e.g.  $\square, \curvearrowright$ ). Rather, it is most often followed by a divine determinative, and several times it is written more fully just like the toponym Heliopolis:  $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ . Since the latter spelling occurs already in the Eighteenth Dynasty, it is hard to conclude with Jansen-Winkeln that those examples represent “sekundäre Ausdeutungen.”

Rather, all the evidence points towards a divinity associated with Heliopolis via a nisba-adjective (“the Heliopolitan”), just as many had translated this term previously

(Jansen-Winkeln 2000, 95, n. 96). Identification with a divinity is precisely what one expects at the end of a protective formula. As in the numerous examples of *Gliedervergottung*, this statement motivates the City God to act: since the statue’s subject has become the god Iuny, he deserves the god’s protection.

Who precisely is Iuny? As Jansen-Winkeln observed, sometimes this term is replaced in the formula with “Amun” or “Osiris” (2000, 95–96). What he did not mention, however, is that Iuny is also a common epithet for both of those gods<sup>40</sup>.

Of the two gods, the epithet *Iwny* (or *Iwn*) more commonly denotes Osiris, to the extent that he functions as an ideogram for *Iwn* in sportive spellings of *Iwn.t*, “Dendera” in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods:  $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ <sup>41</sup>. As one text from the pronaos of Dendera reveals<sup>42</sup>:

<i>wnn Wsʹr Hr-ʹIs.t k3.tw</i>	“Osiris-Horus-Isis” is what
<i>r [niwtj] Iwn.t</i>	“[the city] of Dendera is called:”
<i>Iwn m Wsʹr</i>	“The <i>Iwn</i> is Osiris,”
<i>wc.t m ʹIs.t</i>	“one is Isis,”
<i>wc m Hr imʹtw it=f mw.t=f</i>	“one is Horus in between his mother and father.”

This sportive group has usually been interpreted as purely figurative – a major divine triad of Dendera stands for the entire city<sup>43</sup> – but it can also be explained phonetically:

$\text{𓂏} = iwn$   
 $\text{𓂏} = nt (< ntr)$ <sup>44</sup>  
 $\text{𓂏} = t (< \text{feminine ending})$ <sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Wb. I, 53, 20–22; 54, 7; LGG I, 193–197.

<sup>41</sup> For examples of this spelling, see Cauville 2001, 43; 2013, 71, n. 31; Kurth 2008–9, I, 160, n. 478. Note that it occurs already in Edfou I, 410, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Dendara XIII, 89, 12–13; Cauville 2011, 116–117; 2013, 70–71.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Fairman 1945, 251, No. VIII: “I am quite unable to suggest any way in which [the signs] could have become monoconsonantal”; Cauville 1990, 89, n. 2: “l’écriture (...) est énigmatique”; Cauville 2002, 113, n. 30: “La graphie (...) est courante, elle n’est cependant pas explicable alphabétiquement”; Cauville 2013, 71: “Par ailleurs, *Jounet* est très souvent écrit avec les trois dieux, sans que l’on puisse fournir une explication graphique (totalement) satisfaisante”; Kurth, 2008–9, I, 160, n. 478: “Es ist eine Qualität des Tempels von Dendera, daß die Gottheiten Osiris, Harsomtus und Hathor-Isis in ihm wohnen.”

<sup>44</sup> For this ideographic value of the Horus figure, see Kurth 2008–9, I, 162, n. 542; add also Dendara XIII, 183, 10 and 14; 349, 4; Dendara XIV, 3, 6; 145, 7; Cauville 2013, 596.

<sup>45</sup> Compare the common use of a seated goddess to write the first or second person singular feminine pronouns (Kurth 2008–9, I, 136–137, 144, nos. 48, 57, 88–89). Just like the suffix pronoun, the goddess in this spelling of Dendera is variable: most often Isis, but also

This solution is suggested, *inter alia*, from another text at Dendera, where Horus writes *ntr* and Osiris writes *Iwny* (Dendara XIV, 59, 6):



*Wsr wn-nfr m<sup>3</sup>-hrw* “Osiris-Wennefer, justified,”  
*ntr 3 hry-ib Iwn.t* “Great god within Dendera,”  
*Iwny wr hnt T3-rr* “Great Iwny within Tarer.”

Although it very frequently applies to Osiris, the theological significance of the epithet *Iwny* remains a mystery: as part of the original Ennead, Osiris was naturally linked to Heliopolis, multiple priests served his local cult<sup>46</sup>, and he figured prominently in the regional mythology<sup>47</sup>. Heliopolis naturally evokes solar cults, so the epithet might refer specifically to the unified Re-Osiris buried in Heliopolis<sup>48</sup>. Private individuals might aspire to this particularly solar aspect of Osiris, so that their statues might similarly unite with Re their Bas every day, receiving offerings for all eternity. Hence the statement in the Saite Formula that “his Ka (viz. the statue of the deceased) is in front of him (viz. his Ba)” (cf. *supra*).

What is important for our discussion is that the formula identifies the statues as forms of Osiris: that is, physical manifestations of the blessed dead (*hzy.w*). This explains both why this expression (*Iwny pw*) is often followed by *m<sup>3</sup>-hrw*, “justified,” and why the term *Iwny* is sometimes replaced with *hzy*, “blessed dead” (Jansen-Winkel 2000, 94–96). As the Eighteenth Dynasty statue of Minemhab requests, after invoking the protection of the City God with a subjunctive *sdm=f* (cf. *supra*, New Kingdom Examples):<sup>49</sup>

*di=k zm3=i hr hzy.w* “May you allow me to associate with the blessed dead.”

Since the statue owners all obtained the status of Osiris, they are permitted to join his transfigured followers in the afterlife. This is why they expect to move about, and demand unfettered transit throughout the Underworld (i.e. *ni d3.tw rd.wy=fy*). Moreover, their statues are entitled to the same protection as Osiris, the Heliopolitan, himself.

Who then is the City God? The simplest answer comes from trilingual decrees of Ptolemy V, where the phrase corresponds to Greek: ὁ κυριώτατος θεὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ, “the presiding divinity of the temple”<sup>50</sup>. For many of the New

Kingdom or Karnak Cachette examples, this honor might go to Amun, just as on the Minemhab statue translated earlier (M)<sup>51</sup>. As outlined above, the Theban examples would naturally invoke the god Amun as his processional image passed through Karnak temple, pleading for him to stop and bless all the deserving private statues; that is, all those containing the Saite formula.

However, on the numerous Twenty-Sixth Dynasty statues from Sais, where Osiris of the *Hwt-Bity* was the chief local god, this epithet would then refer to the god of the dead. The same would apply to all the examples found on shabtis and tomb statues. As a confusing result, Osiris could sometimes be both the City God, whom the statue owner appealed to for protection, and the Heliopolitan (*Iwny*), with whom the statue owner identified. For this reason, Osiris could be called<sup>52</sup>:

*Iwny m Iwny.t* “Iwny in Esna (Iwnyt),”  
*ntr-niwtwy m sp3.t nb* “the City God in every nome.”

## 4 Conclusion

The preceding investigation relied on two exceptional attestations of the so-called “Saite Formula” from the New Kingdom. Although the majority of Late Period examples suggest the verbal form should be understood as passive – despite the incredibly awkward syntax that results – few of those orthographies were truly decisive. Instead, the context of the New Kingdom versions requires a translation with the imperative verb form, suggesting a new interpretation for most of the later examples. These variants cannot be dismissed as early experiments; rather, along with other Eighteenth Dynasty versions, they demonstrate a coherent understanding of the formula at its very inception, before the various elements were simplified graphically.

This new translation is not a mere grammatical trifle; it changes the entire meaning of the formula. Accordingly, the statement is no longer a banal *Stiftungsvermerk*, certifying that the statue has been properly sanctified, that the City God has been installed almost as an attribute into the back pillar by priests and artisans. Rather, the formula is entirely performative, linked to a specific time and place, and attributing agency to both the statue’s dedicant and his City God. The individual, identifying himself with Osiris-Iwny (justified), implores the City God to surround

Hathor (Kurth 2008–9, I, 160, n. 478) and even Mut (Dendara XIV, 3, 6; Dendara XV, 269, 9).

<sup>46</sup> E.g. Yoyotte 1954, 91.

<sup>47</sup> Meeks 2006, 6–7, 10, 12–13.

<sup>48</sup> For the tomb of Re-Osiris at Heliopolis, see Manassa 2007, I, 424–427; Yoyotte 2013, 72–75.

<sup>49</sup> Berman 1999, 234, col. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Wb. II, 211, 2; for example Urk. II, 189, 10; 207, 3.

<sup>51</sup> For more examples outside of the “Saite Formula” where the City God denotes Amun, see LGG IV, 426–427.

<sup>52</sup> Esna III, 296, D; for the second epithet, see also Esna IV, 454, 3.



his statue with protection (employing the imperative, subjunctive, or even a jussive adverbial clause). This interaction occurs while (*h/fi*) the statue of the City God stops in front of the statue: in other words, during a divine procession through the temple or necropolis. The City God's protection is not guaranteed automatically, simply by adding a back pillar to a statue. The dedicant must continually negotiate this intimate relationship, by means of the inscribed, performative Saite formula.

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