

SHORT REPORT

Who Or What Is Werethekau 'Great of Magic'? A Problematic Inscription (UC 16639)

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In this paper, I investigate the identity of Werethekau through a previously unpublished limestone block at the Petrie Museum (UC 16639). It is not recorded when or where this block was found; the context, a central and identifying feature for the archaeological discipline, is lost (Johnson 1999: 107). The Petrie Museum records do not include the method or date of acquisition. I will focus here on the following questions: What does this object represent? Who is Werethekau? Is it an epithet for a goddess, or a name for a material object, or for a goddess frequently associated with the coronation of the king? The discussion also introduces the approach on which I rely for the identification of the object and its chronology. A further aim in this publication is to bring the object to the attention of a wider readership of scholars of Egyptian archaeology in an attempt to find the missing parts.

Almost three years ago, I came to University College London, meeting curator Stephen Quirke at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. The inscribed limestone block UC 16639 attracted my attention as a source for the name of Werethekau, the topic of my PhD thesis *Werethekau 'Great of Magic' in the religious landscape of ancient Egypt*, which investigates the materiality and scope of Werethekau within the religious landscape of ancient Egyptian archaeology. This name is attested from the third millennium BC to the Roman Period (2375- BC-AD 395) as: (a) a designation for a material object (e.g. Red Crown, White Crown, Double Crown, the amulets of the vulture and the cobra (Hannig 2006: 705–6; Nebe 1986: 1221–2) (b) as an epithet for other goddesses (e.g. 'Isis, the great, mother of the god, lady of heaven,

Great of Magic' (Nelson 1981: pls. 88 (7), 138 (32)), and (c) as the name for a separate goddess who is associated with the coronation of the king (e.g. Abdel-Raziq 1986: 65, 67, 70–71; Badawy *et al.* 1989: 25, 43, pl. 20; Burgos and Larché 2006: 79, 84, 124, 127, 138–139, 140–141; Nelson 1981: pls. 70, 192).

The block is not cited in the lexicon of Leitz on Egyptian deities (2002: II, 493–98), and seems never to have been published. It is kept at the Petrie Museum (**Figure 1**). The date of acquisition is not recorded. Petrie (1937: ix-x) did not keep an accession register, compiling instead simple inventories for overlapping publications of each type of object. In the main, the museum accurately records the measurements and date of acquisition of each object in its register, but unfortunately, UC 16639 does not have a date of acquisition.

The object is almost square, measuring 17 cm in height and 15 cm in width. There is a vertical column of sunken hieroglyphic inscriptions between two incised lines, reading from right to left. The signs are roughly

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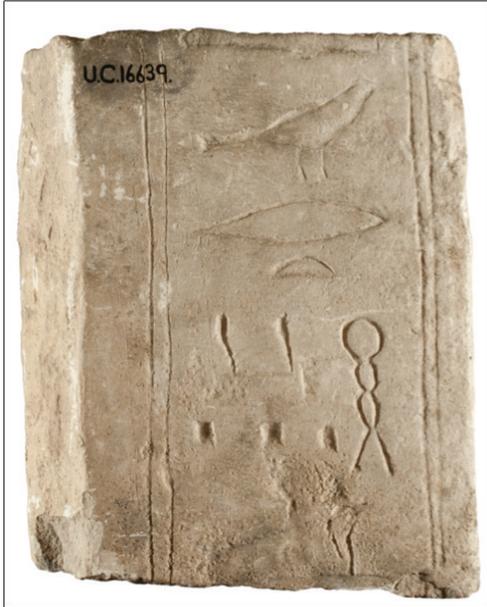


Fig. 1: A left jamb fragment, UC 16639. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology



Fig. 3: The back of UC 16639. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology

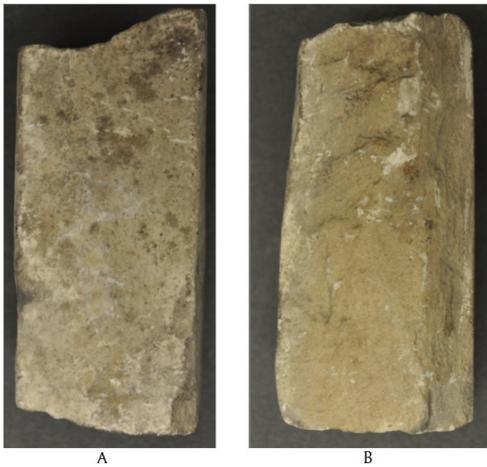


Fig. 2: The right (A) and the left (B) sides of UC 16639. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology

formed. The lower part may have been re-carved. The hieroglyphic inscription is interrupted at the top and bottom of the block, indicating that it is a part of a vertical stack of blocks (cf. Arnold 2003: 74). The right side of the block is almost flat while the left side is rough and leans at an angle (Figure 2). There

are surviving marks of tool-cuts. This suggests that the right side forms the inside part of this object, the left side forms the outer side, and the block itself forms the left part of a bigger building (cf. Habachi 1985: pls. 8, 38). The back of the block is nearly flat and has black spots; there are also visible tool-marks (Figure 3). It was probably designed to be placed in mud brick (cf. Spencer 1997: pls. 94 b, 122–3).

A. J. Arkell, curator of the Petrie Museum (1948–63, Dawson 1995: 19), wrote the registration entry pertaining to this object in 1960: 'Provenance?? Fayum'. This way of recording is misleading; why did he suppose that the provenance was the Fayum? He may simply have drawn this conclusion because he thought (wrongly: see below) that the name of the god Sebek of the Fayum is written on the inscription (Figure 1). There is no further documentation for this object, so it is not clear who found the object. The four main possibilities for the finder are:

A. Edwards, who gifted her books and collections of antiquities to University

College London when she died (Rees 1998: 69; Quirke 2010: 21),

W.M.F. Petrie, who led excavations in Egypt from 1880–1924 (Drower 1985; Quirke 2010). Over three-quarters of the material in the museum comes from excavations directed, or funded by him, and he also purchased objects for UCL (UCL Petrie Collection Online Catalogue),

A contemporary excavator: possibly J. Garstang who started excavating with Petrie in 1899 and who was probably taught by Petrie and his wife Hilda (Quirke 2010: 150), or G. Brunton, who was a student of Petrie and excavated with him in Lahun (Drower 1985: 327–8),

A contemporary collector.

Any object has a particular meaning through its context; one can build up associations and placements for the context in which the object is found, but the context in this case, a central and identifying feature for the archaeological discipline, is lost (Johnson 1999: 107).

Arkell described the block as follows: 'Limestone fragment with a column of hieroglyphs between double incised lines "great lady of magic Sebek"' (Museum Register). Regardless of Arkell's translation for the names engraved on this fragment (see below), this information is not enough to determine what the fragment represents. The object could be a left jamb of a door of a small chapel or shrine (cf. Habachi 1985: pls. 8, 38, 79b, 100; Spencer 1997: pls. 94, 122). The fragment can also be compared with two sandstone fragments of a jamb found in Aniba Temple (**Figure 4**) and dating to the Nineteenth Dynasty (Steindorff 1937; 23, pl. 10, 28). However, the material and the style of sunken relief of the Aniba inscription are different. The name of Werethekau and her epithets are mentioned on these fragments from Aniba: 'Werethekau, lady of the [palace], lady of heaven, mistress of all the lands, she may give the great west...' (Steindorff 1937: 23 (30), pl. 10, (28); for the



Fig. 4: Jamb invoking Werethekau of the temple of Aniba (Steindorff 1937: 23 (30), Taf. 10 (28))

reading of 'lady of the [palace]' cf. Steindorff 1937: 23 (34), pl. 10, (31b)). She is also mentioned on the left jamb of the offering chapel of Bay in the reign of Ramesses III, found at Tell Basta (Gauthier 1923: 169–70; Kitchen 1983: 426, 2).

The name of Werethekau on inscription UC 16639 does not elucidate whether it is referring to the deity, the epithet, or the material object (cf. Leitz 2002: II, 495, 497, 503; Nebe 1986: 1221–2; Ouda forthcoming). The solution could be found in the signs after and before the name of Werethekau. According to Arkell, the ideographic sign after Werethekau's name stands for the crocodile Sebek. But

the known determinatives for Werethekau were the cobra 𐀀, 𐀁 crowns 𐀂, 𐀃, 𐀄, 𐀅 (e.g. el-Hawary 2010: 123, Bild. 13, z. 14 c; Helck 1955: IV, 559 (8); Erman and Grapow 1971:I, 328 (6–7)), a seated woman 𐀆, vulture 𐀇 (Hannig 2006: 705–6), or a man with his hand to his mouth 𐀈 inside the compound Werethekau (e.g. Aston 2000: 160–161, pl. 2; Ouda 2012: 133, fig. 4). However, the identification of the sign is highly uncertain; the front of our sign (see **Figure 1**) is vertical while the snout of the crocodile is typically more horizontal and its head extends beyond the base 𐀉 (Gardiner 1957: sign-list I. 5). This is not the case for the sign in UC 16639.

From my corpus of Werethekau sources, there is no known text in which the name of Werethekau is followed by a crocodile. The ideographic sign on UC 16639 is epigraphically closer to the cobra than the crocodile. Therefore this name perhaps stands for the goddess Werethekau, or the epithet with the determinative of a cobra on a basket, which could be used later (cf. Borchardt 1930: III, 72 (748); Helck 1955: 566 (2): 1995, 5 (10)). Alternatively, the indistinct crocodile could stand for another word or name, especially as the name of Werethekau is written sometimes without any of the determinatives mentioned above (e.g. Barbotin 1999: 20; Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 40, 42–5; Calverley 1958: pl. 75, 9A; Hari 1976: pl. 14A; Kozloff 1992: 117, fig. 3A; Nelson 1981: pls. 191–2).

Epigraphically, the forms of the signs 𐀀 (Gardiner 1957: sign-list G. 36), 𐀁 (Gardiner 1957: sign-list D. 28), and 𐀂 (Gardiner 1957: sign-list V. 28) on UC 16639 are not diagnostic to establish the exact dating of the inscription.

There is another fragmented sign, in the upper part of the block UC 16639 preceding the name of Werethekau, which could be a loaf 𐀃 (fragmented here) on a reed-mat (Gardiner 1957: sign-list R. 4) as a part of an offering formula Htp-(di-nsw) Wrt-HkAw '[an offering]-(that-the-king-gives of) Werethekau' (**Figure 5**; cf. Franke 2003: 39). There is ample evidence to support this argu-

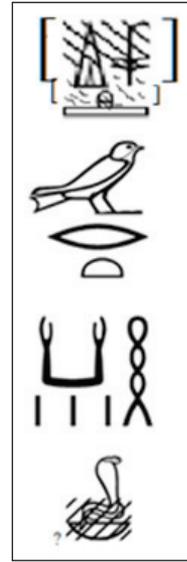


Fig. 5: The assumed reading: '[an-offering] (that-the-king-gives of the goddess) Werethekau', for UC 16639

ment. The 'offering formula' of Werethekau is attested on eleven objects (**Table 1**). Similarly to our assumption regarding UC 16639, the offering formula of Werethekau is attested on the left jamb of the offering chapel of Bay, which is dated to Ramesses III, from Bubastis (Kitchen 1983: V, 426 (2)), a lintel from Amara West (Spencer 2009: 59, pl. 29) and the lintel of Ra-nefer from Aniba (Steindorff 1937: 23 (34), Tf. 10, (31b)), both of the Ramesside Period.

In sum, there is no documentation for this block in relation to the date of acquisition, excavator, or provenance. The block probably represents the left jamb of a door of a chapel or a shrine in a temple or a tomb. The name of Werethekau may stand for the goddess Werethekau, and not for the material object or the epithet. The offering formula (Htp-di-nsw) is not attested for (the goddess) Werethekau before the Eighteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC). As this offering formula is a commonplace for the goddess Werethekau in the Ramesside Period, the block may be dated to the Rameside Period (1292–1069 BC).

No	Source	Dynasty	Material	References
1	Statue of Hor (New York MMA 23.8) from Dendara	18	granite	Helck 1995: 58; Schulz 1992: 436–7; Walle 1971: 132, fig. 1
2	Statue of Tchaouy (BM 1459) from Deir el-Bahari	18–19	black granite	Clère 1981: 214–5; 1995: 202, 204; Schulz 1992: 383; Simpson 1972: 69
3	Statue of Paser (Louvre E 25980) from Memphis or Qantir	19	diorite	Barbotin 1999: 21; Kitchen 1980: III, 10–11; el-Sayed 1975: 32
4	Small temple of Abu Simbel	19	rock-cut temple	Desroches-Noblecourt 1968:72
5	Statuette of Piay from Memphis	19	schist	Clère 1968: pl. 23 (J); Kitchen 1980: III, 440 (8–9)
6	A lintel of Amara West, Sudan	19–20	sandstone	Spencer 2009: 59, pl. 29
7	Stela of Penamun (Bristol H 514) from Abydos (?)	19–20	limestone	Ouda in press
8	Lintel of Ra-nefer from Aniba	19–20	sandstone	Steindorff 1937: 23 (34), Tf. 10, 31b
9	Jambs of the offering chapel of Bay from Tell Basta	20	not recorded	Kitchen 1983: V, 426, 2
10	Statue of Mery-May from Kafr Ed-Deir, Minya el-Qamh, Sharqiya	25 or 26	hard limestone	Habachi 1967: 33–34, figs. 1- 2
11	Statue of Isis (CG 38884) from Saqqara	26	black basalt	Daressy 1906: 221, pl. 44

Tab.1: The offering formulae of Werethekau

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