

The social aspect of expression *s3 s*
“son-of-men”

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The expression *s3 s* is translated *Wb.* III 406(V) as “*vornehmer, bekaunter Mann, Sohn eines Mannes = guter Herkunft*”. According to Faulkner it means “*a well-born man*” (*F.D.* 205-6). Discussing the expression, Gardiner saw in it “*the son of a man*” *i.e.* *doubtless a man who was able to point to a well-to-do father, in opposition to the base-born slave*”.¹ Blackman points out an interesting parallel of *s3 s* with Arabian “*a man of good family, lit. a son of people*”.² Lichtheim adds that there is a similar expression in Hebrew and Aramaic with the same connotation.³

The expression occurs mostly in the literature texts from the Middle Kingdom. It is used only once in a royal inscription. (Stele of Tutankhamon):

Teaching of Ptahhotep 493 (P. Prisse 15, 4)⁴.

3h bit nt s3 s n.f

“*The character of a son-of-man is profit to him*”.

¹ A. Gardiner. *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*. Leipzig 1909, 30.

² A. Blackman. *Notices: Hieratic Papyrus in British Museum*. *JEA* 22 (1936), 104.

³ M. Lichtheim. *Ancient Egyptian Literature. A Book of Readings*. Los Angelis/London 1973 v. 1 79 n. 59

⁴ Z. Žaba. *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep*. Prague 1956, 55.

Teaching of Ptahhotep 564-565 (P. Prisse 16, 13-14)⁵.

ir šsp s3 s dd it.f nn nm.n shr.f nb

*“If a son-of-man takes to heart what is said by his father,
Never will fail any of his plan”.*

Adm. 2,14.

iw ms s3 s ... g3w si3.f

“Forsooth, the well-born man.....without being recognized(?)”

Adm. 4,1

n tni.n.tw s3 s r iwty nf sw

*“The son of a man of rank is no (longer) distinguished from him who has
no such father (?)”*⁶

Hat Nub 8, 3 = Hatnub Gr 24, 1⁷

ink s3 s nht s33 m3 n niwt.f

“I am son-of-man, strong and wise. One who takes care of his town”.

Abydos III, pl. 29.

n 3b(.i) mrt nds ir s3 s irw st it.f bt.f sw m knbt⁸

*“I did not wish to love a youth. As for a son-of-man who does it, his
father shall abandon him in court”.*

Pap. Cheaster Beatty No VII, rt. 5, 8.

s3 s rh(.w) rn.f

*“The son of a man who knows his name”*⁹.

⁵ *Ibid.* 60

⁶ A. Gardiner. H. The Admonition of Egyptian Sage. Leipzig 1909, 30; 35.

⁷ R. Antes. Die Feleninschriften von Hatnub. Leipzig 1928, 54.

⁸ W. M. F. Petrie, Abydos, 3 vols. London (Egypt Exploration Fund), 1902 – 1904.

Urk. IV. 2029, 10 = Stele of Tutankhamon 17

s3 s rh(.w) rh rn.f

“The son of a man who is known and whose name is known.”

Neferty 61-62 (XIVa-XIVb)¹⁰

ršy rmt n.t h3w.f s3 n s r ir.t rn.f r nhḥ hnꜥ dd

“The people of his time will rejoice. Son-of-man will make his name for ever and eternity”.

The frequently mentioned expression *s3 s* and with the name of the person may also reflect the practice to of writing the name of a child in the “house of life”. Another possibility could be that if someone knows the name of the son-of-man, it means that that he (son-of-man) is well-known, namely everybody knows his ability and virtue.

There is no doubt that the expression *s3 s* is connected with the father and that the person who is described as “son-of-man” has father and belongs to his father, as we have seen in Abydos III, pl. 29. For that reason scholars understand this expression as “man who inherits the legacy of his father”. But the phrase may have one other connotation. According to Gardiner, the expression *s3 s* contrasts with the phrase *s3 ḥwrw* FD. 166 “*poor, humble man, despicable person*”¹¹. Looking at it in that way, it is possible *s3 s* to describe not only a men who inherits the legacy of his father but every man who has property, rich man. Another example from the Teaching for king Merikare, supports that supposition:

⁹ A. Blackman. Notices: Hieratic Papyrus in British Museum. JEA 22 (1936), 104.

¹⁰ W. Helck. Die Prophezeiung des Nfr.tj. Wiesbaden. 1970, 52.

¹¹ A. Gardiner. The Admonition of Egyptian Sage. Leipzig 1909, 30 = Ä.Z. 37 (1899), 72.

Merikare 61 (XXII)¹²

m tnt s3 s r nds

“Make no distinction between a son-of-man and a commoner (nds)”.

Here the expression *s3 s* is opposed to the well-known term *nds* FD. 145 *“commoner, citizen”*. The term *nds* in the age of the Middle Kingdom has been researched by O. D. Berlev. According to him *nds* is not a definite strata of ancient Egyptian society but every unimportant person, every poor and needy. The “Small person” (*nds*) doesn't have a social position and is one who has nothing.¹³ Then *s3 s* as antonym of *nds* would mean important person, someone who has property and position in the state.

There is only one example where *s3 s* is used as definition of a person – *ink s3 s* (Inscription of prince *K3j* = Hatnub Gr 24). In every other case *s3 s* is used as collective term which describes a group of people. In Teaching for king Merikare son-of-man is used together with *nds* to show every variety of Egyptian society: “Make no distinction between a son-of-man and a commoner” i. e. between rich and poor; between the one who has position and the workless.

In conclusion the expression *s3 s* with its basic meaning *“the son of a man” a man who was able to point to a well-to-do father*¹⁴ one other connotation - a man of substance. It is not absolutely necessary someone to inherit the possessions of his father to become son-of-man. In the time of Middle Kingdom everybody who possesses property and position could be called *s3 s*.

¹² W. Helck. Die Lehre für König Merikare. Wiesbaden. 1977, 36.

¹³ О. Берлев. Общественные отношения в Египте эпохи Среднего царства. Москва 1978, 89; 92.

¹⁴ A. Gardiner. The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage. Leipzig 1909, 30.

