Werethekau and the votive stela of P3-n-Imn (Bristol Museum H 514)

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This paper investigates the identity of Werethekau, ‘the Great of Magic’, taking a votive stela in Bristol as our point of departure. It also examines her cult and priests. Emphasis is placed on sources that show her, as here, with a cobra head and as a companion to various other deities.\(^1\)

The stela is presently located in the collections of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, bearing the number H 514. The museum’s records do not document the manner and date of acquisition. In 1917 it was found in a store room of the museum and registered. It dates to the Ramesside Period, but the provenance is undocumented. The stela is of limestone (height 38.2 cm, width 27.0 cm, depth 10.0 cm) and is in good condition; only the bottom left corner is slightly worn. No traces remain of painted colours. The stela has not been published before, apart from a photograph in Leslie Grinsell’s catalogue of the museum’s Egyptian collection.\(^2\)

The owner of the stela, named $P^3-n$-Imn, bears the title ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’, which is abbreviated to ‘god’s servant’ in the inscription at the bottom. The stela offers no further information about him or about his family. His name might indicate that he came from Thebes or indicate the worship of Amun in Abydos, but the name was common in the New Kingdom.\(^3\)

The stela is round-topped and bears a scene in sunk relief, and incised texts (Fig. 1). The scene, which forms the upper register, shows the owner of the stela on the right, offering to Osiris and Werethekau. $P^3-n$-Imn is clad in a long robe and leopard skin, primarily associated with $\text{swn}$ priests and $\text{Innmutef}$ priests.\(^4\) In his left hand he holds up a spouted libation vessel, while his right hand is raised in adoration.\(^5\) The hieroglyphic columns above him read:

1. $\text{ir.n hmr-ntr n Wr(t)-(2)hkrw P^3-n$-Imn $m^3-hrw}$

1. Made by the god’s servant of Weret(2)hekau, $P^3-n$-Imn, justified.

An offering stand, placed between $P^3-n$-Imn and Osiris, supports a second libation jar, on top of which lies a lotus flower. Osiris, who is seated on a throne, wears an $\text{atf}$ crown and his body is shrouded. His hands hold a crook and flail against his chest. A vertical line of hieroglyphs in front of his head reads:

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1 I am very grateful to Amber Druce, Collection Officer of Social History at Bristol Museum, for his support and publication permission. I also owe a great debt to Neal Spencer and Stephen Quirke for their help, and to Marcel Marée for editing the article.

2 Grinsell 1972, 53, fig. 30.

3 Ranke 1935, 106 [8].


5 Brunner-Traut 1977, 579 [3a].
(3) **Wsir ḫnty imntt**
(3) Osiris, foremost of the west

Behind Osiris stands a goddess whose head has the shape of a rearing cobra. She wears a tripartite wig, crowned by a modius, and a tight-fitting dress. Her right hand is raised in a gesture of protection; her left arm hangs down and holds an *ankh* sign. She is identified by a vertical hieroglyphic line in front of her head:

(4) **Wrt-hk₃w**
(4) Werethekau

The bottom register contains an offering formula in three horizontal lines of hieroglyphs:

(5) **hṭp-di-nswt Wsir ḫnty imntt Wrt-hk₃w di.sn**
(6) **ḥḥ m t ḫḥ t ḫḥt ḫḥ m iḥw ḫḥ m ṣḥḏw**
(7) **ḥḥ m ḫḥ nb(t) ṣḏ(t) ṣḏ(t) nḥ t n ḫḥ n ṣḥḏw Pḥ-n-ɪmn mḥt-hrw**

(5) An offering-that-the-king-gives of Osiris, foremost of the west, and Werethekau: may they give (6) a thousand of bread, a thousand of beer, a thousand of oxen, a thousand of fowl, (7) and a thousand of everything good and pure to the *ka* of the god’s servant, *Pḥ*-n-ɪmn, justified.

Isis and Nephthys, Hathor, Maat, and, as here, Werethekau could all be depicted as female protectors of Osiris. This shows that any of these goddesses could appear as the female companion and protector of Osiris; the role was not exclusive to Isis, his wife and sister.

What is the nature of the goddess depicted behind Osiris? The name of Werethekau occurs three times on the stela: in the owner’s title ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’, in the caption above the goddess, and in the offering formula. To understand who she is, we shall first examine the various sources that depict her in human body with cobra head, as this is her form on the current stela.

For this form, I know nine further attestations: four on temple walls, one in the form of a temple statue, and four more on other votive stelae. In the mortuary temple of Merenptah at Qurna (Fig. 2), she appears this way behind Amun-Re on the doorway to its north-western magazines. On the exterior south wall of the temple of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu (Fig. 3), a cobra-headed Werethekau stands behind Hapi. The west wing of the 8th pylon

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6 Brunner-Traut 1977, 582 [9].
7 E.g., Lacau 1926, pls 56 [CG 34134], 57 [CG 34137], 69 [CG 34185]; Stewart 1976, pl. 24 [1]; Bierbrier 1982, pls 94, 98, 100; 1987, pls 30 [2], 32, 42 [1–2], 48 [2], 70, 73, 80, 82, 84, 92 [1], 96; 1993, pls 58–63, 64–65 [2], 66–67 [1], 70–71 [1], 72–73, 100–101 [1]; Simpson 1995, pl. 29 [c]; Forgeau 2010, pls 17 [2], 25, 27 [1], 28, 66 [1]; Taylor, 2010, figs on 230 [121], 305 [160].
8 E.g., Lacau 1926, pls 45 [CG 34095], pl. 57 [CG 34139]; Bierbrier 1993, pl. 45 [2].
9 E.g., Bierbrier 1982, pl. 57.
10 Jaritz et al. 1999, 45, fig. 13, pl. 9 [c].
11 Epigraphic Survey 1964, pl. 578 [A].
in Karnak presents a cobra-headed Werethekau behind Ramesses III (Fig. 4). The Qurna and Medinet Habu scenes make clear that Werethekau could not only appear as a female complement to Osiris but also to other gods, such as Amun-Re and Hapi. In the temple of Hibis (el-Kharga Oasis) she returns in the same form between Atum and the little-known deities Ahawer and Aharekhty, receiving milk from Darius I (Fig. 5).

The statue that also showed her cobra-headed (the head itself is now missing) was found in the temple of Karnak (Fig. 6; Cairo CG 42002). On stylistic grounds it may be dated to Dynasty 19, and it depicts Werethekau suckling a royal or divine child.

The four remaining depictions of the cobra-headed Werethekau appear on votive stelae similar to Bristol H 514. One of them is London UC 14406 (Fig. 7). Like the Bristol stela, it is round-topped, made of limestone and probably Ramesside. It is poorly preserved and was bought in Abydos by Petrie. The owner, a ‘chantress of Osiris’ named /…-/t3wy, is shown adoring Werethekau. Her title may confirm that the stela also came from Abydos, and it may well be from Mariette’s ‘necropolis of chantresses’, as we shall see. Between the worshipper and the goddess stands an offering table, but the offerings have eroded away. The figure of Werethekau recalls that on the Bristol stela, but here she wears a plumed crown, and the ankh sign is now in her right hand, while her left arm presumably held a wadj sceptre (see below).

The caption in front of her reads:

(1) dd mdw in Wrt-hkAw
(2) nbt st t3wy wi3

(1) Words spoken by Werethekau, (2) lady of the throne of the Two Lands and the sacred boat

A further group of hieroglyphs behind her has been interpreted as the name of the goddess Renenutet, but, as mentioned above, this stela was bought from Abydos, and no other

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12 PM II, 175 [519].
13 There are also depictions of her in fully human form behind Atum (Epigraphic Survey 1963, pl. 376 [A2]) and Hapi (Epigraphic Survey 1964, pl. 584 [C]), and with the head of a lioness behind Re-Horakhti (el-Achirie and Jacquet 1984, pl. 32), Horus of Buhen (Smith 1976, pl. 23 [4]), and Amun-Re (Epigraphic Survey 1957, pl. 343 [B]).
14 Davies 1953, 20, pl. 21 [west wall, top].
15 Daumas 1967, 207–8; Legrain 1906, 2, pl. 1.
16 Hermann 1939, 174, n. 2, pl. 29; Wildung 1969, 175–76 [XXI. 120].
17 Compare the relief representation of a lion-headed Wrt-hkkw n(t) 3t3w, ‘Werethekau of Abydos’, suckling a child in the temple of Hibis: Davies 1953, pl. 4 [III, far right]. Pendant Cairo JE 61952 shows Werethekau as a cobra with human head, arms and breast, suckling Tutankhamun (Bosse-Griffiths 1973; Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985, 6–7, pls 6–7, 23 [c].
18 Stewart 1976, 43, pl. 34 [1]; Onstine 2005, 122 [499].
19 Petrie notebook 4 (1899–1900).
20 For comparable scenes with wadj sceptre, see, e.g., Bruyère 1930, 170, fig. 91, and 231, fig. 119, both featuring the cobra-headed goddess Meretseger.
21 Stewart 1976, 43.
stelae from there mention Renenutet. All the known representations of Renenutet found at Abydos are statues. In fact, the terminal signs are best interpreted as the epithet nbt dt, ‘lady of eternity’.  

Three limestone stelae with depictions of Werethekau were found at Abydos in a cemetery located on a slope between the Shunet el-Zebib and Mariette’s Middle Cemetery, partly even between that structure’s south enclosure-walls. The approximate date of these stelae is suggested by a further votive stela from this cemetery that dates its owner to the reign of Ramesses XI (Cairo TR 11.11.24.2). Mariette called this cemetery the ‘necropolis of chantresses’, but he never published archaeological details. The present location of the three stelae is the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The first stela (Cairo TR 11.11.24.3) shows a ‘chantress of Isis’ named Ti-mwt-nfr(t) in front of Isis-Werethekau, shaking a sistrum with her right hand while her left hand is raised in a gesture of adoration (Fig. 8). The inscription in front of Ti-mwt-nfr(t) reads ‘adoring Werethekau, may they give life and health to the ka of the chantress of Isis, T3-mwt-nfr(t)’. The goddess wears a crown composed of a modius, a sun disc, double plumes and two cow horns. She holds a wadj sceptre with her forward hand while the other hand holds the hand of a male companion. The man is identified in a caption reading ir.n sdmm-w n Wsir P3-wmns, ‘made by the servant of Osiris P3-wmns’.

On the second stela (Cairo TR 14.3.25.14), ‘the lady of the house, the chantress of [Mut], [...]/by’ is offering flowers to Werethekau, ‘mistress of the gods’, the latter now crowned by a modius with only a sun disc and cow horns (Fig. 9). Werethekau holds a wadj sceptre in her left hand and an ankh sign in her right hand. The green and the red colours are preserved on the stela.

On the third stela (Fig. 10; Cairo JE 18527), Werethekau bears the epithet ‘lady of the palace’ (nbt ‘ht) and she accompanies Osiris, Horus, the avenger of his father, and Isis of Dh3(?). Werethekau wears a crown composed of a modius, sun disc, double plumes and two cow horns. She holds an ankh sign in her left hand. The owner of the stela, this time not depicted on the stela, is identified as ‘the lady of the house, the chantress of Osiris, Horus and Isis’ Mr(t)-‘ht.

On a fourth Abydos stela (Cairo TR. 10.3.25.17), Werethekau is not depicted, but the owner is represented raising a sistrum in front of Osiris and identified as ‘the chantress’ T3-Wr(t)-hk3w.

22 Mariette 1880, 442–61.
23 Ayrton et al. 1904, 54 [93], pl. 50 [centre, second and fourth]; Broekhuis 1971, 46 [75], 51 [87].
24 Behind a deity’s head one usually finds epithets, especially if the name appears already in front of the deity.
25 Mariette 1880, 441–42, 448 [1189–90], 450 [1196]; Kemp 1975, 36; PM V, 53.
27 Onstine 2005, 82.
28 Mariette 1880, 448 [1189].
29 Mariette 1880, 448 [1190].
30 Mariette 1880, 450 [1196].
31 Perhaps this refers to the city Dh3 in the 18th nome of Upper Egypt, modern el-Hiba; cf. Gauthier 1929, 97.
32 Mariette 1880, 446 [1184].
Significantly, the owners of all the earlier stelae are chantresses: of Osiris on London UC 14406, of Isis on Cairo TR 11.11.24.3, of Mut on Cairo TR 14.3.25.14, and of Osiris, Horus and Isis on Cairo JE 18527 (where Werethekau and the Osirian triad are depicted together). The stelae may well attest to the former existence of a shrine for Werethekau at Abydos, or else to the worship of this goddess in the shrine of another deity.

We may conclude that stela London UC 14406 derives most probably from the same cemetery as the Mariette stelae. Bristol H 514 could also be from Abydos, because it features Osiris, and the other votive stelae showing Werethekau as a cobra-headed woman are all from Abydos. Also, it is interesting to note that all the votive stelae discussed date to the Ramesside Period. The depiction of Werethekau alongside the full Osirian triad confirms her importance as an independent cult figure, especially since she bears the epithet ‘lady of the palace’, which is not attested for Isis and which may have been Werethekau’s principal epithet (see also below).

The connection between Werethekau and Abydos finds additional support in other sources. The roughly contemporary stela Naples 1020 features Werethekau (once fully as a snake, once as a human-headed snake) alongside the Osirian triad and other Abydene deities, and she is called ‘Werethekau of the District of Peqer’, in reference to a sector of Abydos. And centuries later she appears with the head of a lioness, suckling royal or divine child, and identified as Wrt-hkbw n(t) lbw, ‘Werethekau of Abydos’, in the temple of Hibis. In addition, three monuments from Abydos name a Pt-di 3st who was ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’ in Dynasty 26.

Priests of Werethekau

I know of only two surviving statues of Werethekau, both now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo: one is the afore-mentioned statue from the Karnak Cachette (Cairo CG 42002), the other is probably from the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Heitan (Cairo N 127). These may be regarded as evidence for the cult of Werethekau. Divine statues, in which the gods manifested themselves, were the focus of daily rituals, fulfilled by priests on the king’s behalf. It has been repeatedly claimed that there is no evidence for priests of Werethekau, but priests of Werethekau are well documented on our afore-mentioned stela

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33 Cf. Hölbl 1985, pl. 13.
34 Leitz (ed.) 2002, IV, 32.
36 Davies 1953, pl. 4 [III, far right].
37 The monuments in question are discussed further below:
38 Legrain 1906, 2, pl. 1; Wildung 1969, 175–76.
39 Bryan 1997, 73 [26], pl. 15 [b].
40 Spencer 2010, 260–61; Clarysse 2010, 276.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/online_journals/bmsaes/issue_22/mekawy.aspx
Bristol H 514 by a variety of sources. These attest four different titles:

\( w^b \text{ Wr}(t)-hk\bar{3}w, \) ‘pure-priest of Werethekau’

A votive stela of Dynasty 22, found in front of the second gate of the Serapeum in Saqqara (now Louvre IM 3141), belongs to a \( P s^t.q db \) with this title.\(^{42}\) Pure-priests were of lower rank than the ‘god’s servants’ (\( h^m-ntr \)) and had no access to the cult statue in the sanctuary of the temple. Pure-priests only had access to processional figures of gods, which they carried in festive processions.\(^{43}\)

\( w^b n w^b(w) n(w) \text{ Wrt-hk}\bar{3}w, \) ‘chief of the pure-priests of Werethekau’

This title occurs on four objects: relief Boston 1972.651,\(^{44}\) offering table Cairo JE 27987,\(^{45}\) statue British Museum EA 1459,\(^{46}\) and a brick Berlin 15704.\(^{47}\) All four belong to the same person, a ‘royal cup-bearer’ (\( wbi-nswt \)), ‘god’s servant of the living royal \( k\bar{a} \) (\( h^m-ntr n k\bar{a}-nswt 'n\bar{h} \)) and ‘pure of hands’ (\( w^b 'wy \)) named \( T\bar{w}wy \), from Dynasty 19 or 20.\(^{48}\)

\( h^m-ntr \text{ Wrt-hk}\bar{3}w, \) ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’

This title is well attested in a wide range of places:

1. Stela Louvre C 65 (temp. Amenhotep III; undocumented provenance): the owner, \( Ps^t.s r \) the elder, was \( imy-r imy(w)-hnt h^m-ntr Wrt-hk\bar{3}w, \) ‘overseer of chamberlains and god’s servant of Werethekau’,\(^{49}\) and is also simply called \( imy-hnt, \) ‘chamberlain’.\(^{50}\)

2. Pyramidion Leiden AM 6 (temp. Amenhotep III; from Saqqara): the owner, the \( imy-r pr wr \) (\( m Mn-nfr \)), ‘high steward (in Memphis)’, named \( Imn-Htp \), included among his many titles that of ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’.\(^{51}\)

3. Tomb relief Uppsala 1 (Dynasty 19; from Abydos): this mentions a man who was ‘god’s servant of Horus, avenger of his father’ (\( h^m-ntr Hr-nd-it.f \)), ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’, and ‘god’s servant of Wadjet and Nekhbet’ (\( h^m-ntr Wdjt(y) \)).\(^{52}\)

4. \( Ps^t-n-Imn \) bears on our stela Bristol H 514 the title ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’ (\( h^m-ntr Wrt-hk\bar{3}w \)), which is abbreviated on the same stela as ‘the god’s servant’ (\( h^m-ntr \)).

5. Votive stela Louvre IM 2785 (Dynasty 26; from the Serapeum in Saqqara): the owner, a ‘god’s father, god’s servant and governor’ (\( it-nTr h^m-ntr h\bar{3}ty-s \)) called \( St-Pth \), also held the

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\(^{42}\) Malinine et al. 1968, 59–60 [67], pl. 20 [67].

\(^{43}\) Kruchten 1989, 251–54; Spencer 2010, 257.

\(^{44}\) Simpson 1973, 72, 76.

\(^{45}\) Daressy 1916, 59, l. 10; Clère 1981, 214 [c], pl. 27 [2].

\(^{46}\) Naville and Hall 1913, 7, pl. 9 [A.a]; Schulz 1992, 383 [221], pl. 100; Clère 1995, 203, fig. 66b [C, 2], 204 [C, 2], 207, pl. 33 [d].


\(^{48}\) Clère 1995, 200, n. 29.

\(^{49}\) Drioton 1933, 25 and pl. 4, in main inscription, ll. 2 and 4 (the latter only has \( imy-r imyw-xnt \)).

\(^{50}\) Drioton 1933, 25–27, in caption to his figure and in main inscription, ll. 6–7, 9.

\(^{51}\) Leemans 1867, pl. 1; Boeser 1913, 1 [1], fig. 4; Hayes 1938, 19; Morkot 1990, 324.

\(^{52}\) Lugn 1922, 21 [22], pl. 16 [22a].
title $hm-ntr\ Wr(t)'hk\w\ nbt\ 'h$, ‘god’s servant of Werethekau, lady of the palace’. This is the first time that we encounter the goddess’s epithet ‘lady of the palace’ as part of a priestly title. We have already encountered Werethekau with this epithet on one of Mariette’s stelae from Abydos, and apparently she was worshipped in the same form in Memphis.

(6a) A votive stela formerly in the Amherst collection (Dynasties 25–30): the owner’s father, $Pt-di-\lst$, bears, among others, the titles $hm-ntr\ whm\ Wsr\ …\ hm-ntr\ Hr\ nd\ it\ hm-ntr\ \lst\ nb(t)\ pr-ms\ hm-ntr\ Wr(t)'hk\w\ nb(t)'h$, ‘second god’s servant of Osiris … god’s servant of Horus, avenger of his father, god’s servant of Isis, lady of the house of birth, and god’s servant of Werethekau, lady of the palace’. The stela bears a representation of the Osirisian triad and constitutes further evidence that Werethekau was regarded as a goddess separate in nature from Isis; the principal epithet of Werethekau, ‘lady of the palace’, is not attested for Isis.

(6b) A pyramidion in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (TR 15.3.25.6; found in Abydos): the same $Pt-di-\lst$ recurs as ‘second god’s servant of Osiris … god’s servant of Horus, avenger of his father, god’s servant of Isis, lady of the House of birth, and god’s servant of Werethekau, (lady) of the palace’.

(6c) A block statue formerly in the Michaelides collection (undoubtedly from Abydos): $Pt-di-\lst$ appears once more as ‘second god’s servant of Osiris … god’s servant of Horus, avenger of his father, god’s servant of Isis, lady of the House of birth, and god’s servant of Werethekau’. This time Werethekau is named without her epithet.

(7) Statue Vatican 167 + Brooklyn 60.11 (Dynasty 26; provenance unknown): the owner $Pt-dhbw$ held among his priestly titles that of $hm-ntr\ Wr(t)'hk\w$, ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’.

(8) Coffin Cairo CG 41017 from Deir el-Bahri (Dynasty 26): a ‘god’s servant of Montu, lord of Thebes’ ($hm-ntr\ Mntw\ nb\ W3st$) named $Hrw$ gives among his other titles that of ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’.

Two earlier instances of the title, both from Dynasty 12, pertain not to the Werethekau but to the crowns:

(9) Stela BM EA 839 (Dynasty 12, reign of Amenemhat II): the owner, a ‘king’s acquaintance’ ($rh-nswt$) named $Smty$ the Elder, was $hm-ntr\ Wrty-hk\w$, ‘god’s servant of the Two-Great-of-Magics’. The dual form in this case is noteworthy; this title refers to the crowns of Upper

53 Malinine et al. 1968, 132–33 [172], pl. 47 [172].
54 Sharpe 1855, pl. 68; Sotheby’s 1921, 25 [239], pl. 6; Munro 1973, 292–93, pl. 39 [147]; von Känel 1984, 86–88 [41].
55 Leitz (ed.) 2002, IV, 32.
56 Mariette 1880, 562 [1435]; von Känel 1984, 89–90 [C]. Evidently, Mariette wrongly transcribed the $h$ in Werethekau’s name as a $hs$ vase.
57 Von Känel 1984, 89 [B].
58 Bothmer 1960, 66 [56], pl. 53 [130]; el-Sayed 1975, 231 [8].
59 Moret 1913, 179.
60 Hall 1912, 6 [147], pl. 7; Simpson 1974, 20, pl. 61 [ANOC 42.1]. Cf. mss $wr-t-hk\w$, “who created the Great-of-Magic crown”, on stela BM EA 574: Hall 1912, 6, pl. 8; Gardiner 1953, 26, Simpson 1974, 20, pl. 61 [ANOC 42.2].
and Lower Egypt.  

(10) Stela Cairo CG 20683 (late Dynasty 12): Iy-hr-nfr, the famous ‘treasurer’ (jmj-r hmtt), boasts the titles of hm-ntr Wrt-hkAw hry sštš n wḏty, ‘god’s servant of the Great of Magic (crown), and master of secrets of Wadjet and Nekhbet’, in clear reference to the king’s crowns.  

In the last two cases, I presume that the title holders were in charge of the king’s crowns and that they were allowed to place them on his head. The idea of a priestly function in relation to the king’s crowns recurs on stela BM EA 574 of Smty the Younger, brother of the owner of BM EA 839. Smty the Younger included among his titles those of hm-ntr n šm’š. mḥw.s, ‘god’s servant of (the crowns) She-of-Upper-Egypt and She-of-Lower-Egypt’, and hm nt m pr-nw, ‘servant of the crown of Lower Egypt in the per-nu’.  

\textit{hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-hkAw}, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’  

This title suggests that there was a hierarchy of Werethekau priests, analogous to the ‘first’, ‘second’, ‘third’, and even ‘fourth god’s servants’ that have been attested for certain other deities. Such a hierarchy is particularly well attested at Karnak during the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period. It normally marked a difference between the great temples, with many ‘god’s servants’, from smaller ones that would be served by a single priesthood. For Werethekau no sources attest ‘second’, ‘third’, or ‘fourth god’s servants’. Five people are attested with the title \textit{hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-hkAw}, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’:

(1) The tomb of Imn-htp in Qurna (temp. Amenhotep III)\(^66\) records for him the titles \textit{imy-xnt wr m pr-wr šhrk nswt m pr-nsr [ḥsy] n nb tāwy m ṣḥ [hm-ntr tpy n] Wr(t)-hkw, ‘great chamberlain in the per-wr, who adorns the king in the per-nesr, praised by the lord of the Two Lands in the palace, [first god’s servant of] Werethekau’\(^67\).

(2) On the votive stela of Nfr-rnpt found in Abydos, now in the Cairo museum (TR 14.6.24.17; Dynasty 19), his brother Imn-wḥ-sw bears the titles \textit{hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-hkAw ḫmwr-xnt (n nb tāwy)}, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau and overseer of chamberlains (of the lord of the Two Lands)’\(^68\).

The best attested priest in this group is Pt-sr, who served as a vizier at the court of Seti I and Ramesses II of Dynasty 19.\(^69\) The title occurs ten times (once with the dual form \textit{Wrt-wḥ-kw}) on a total of seven monuments:

(3a) On his statue at University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology E.534, found in the temple of Montuhotep Nebhepetre at Deir el-Bahri, he bears the title

\(^{61}\) See, e.g., Pyr. 2279c.

\(^{62}\) Lange and Schäfer 1908, 310; Simpson 1974, 17, pl. 2 [ANOC 1.5].

\(^{63}\) Hall 1912, pl. 8; Gardiner 1953, 26.

\(^{64}\) Spencer 2010, 257; Clarysse 2010, 287.


\(^{66}\) PM I, 456 [C. 1].

\(^{67}\) Loret 1884, 30; Helck 1958, 1938 [9–12].

\(^{68}\) Mariette, 1880, 434 [1159]; Pichl 1895, pls 91–92.

\(^{69}\) Donohue 1988, 103–23; Raedler 2004, 309–54 [4.2].
‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’.70

(3b) On block statue Cairo JE 38062 from the Karnak Cachette,71 $\text{P3-sr}$ is twice given this title. The inscription on his knees calls him $\text{hm-ntr Mfr} \text{ hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-hksw imy-r imyw-hnt n nb tswy}$, ‘god’s servant of Maat, first god’s servant of Werethekau, overseer of chamberlains of the lord of the Two Lands’.72 The inscription on the left side pertains to the king’s crowns: $\text{shkr Hr.f hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-t>y>-hksw}$, ‘who adorns his Horus (i.e. the king), the first god’s servant of the Two-Great-of-Magic (crows)’.73 The word for the two crowns is written with the determinatives of the white and the red crown. This indicates that we must read the dual form $\text{Wrt-y-hksw}$, and that it refers to the crowns worn by the king at his coronation and other appearances.

(3c) On double statue Cairo CG 561 of $\text{P3-sr}$ and his mother $\text{Mryt-R}$, which was found at Deir el-Bahri, again one of his titles is ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’.74

(3d) On statue Cairo CG 630, found in the temple of Ptah in Memphis,75 $\text{P3-sr}$ lists among his titles those of $\text{hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-hksw imy-r imyw-hnt n nb tswy}$, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau, overseer of chamberlains of the lord of the Two Lands’.76

(3e) A statue found at Tell el-Rub’a (present location unknown) attests him again as ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau and overseer of chamberlains of the lord of the Two Lands’.77

(3f) On his statue, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek AEIN 50, of which the provenance is unknown, he bears again the titles $\text{hm-ntr tpy n Wrt-hksw imy-r imyw-hnt n nb tswy}$, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau and overseer of chamberlains of the lord of the Two Lands’.78

(3g) In the tomb of $\text{P3-sr}$, TT 106 at Qurna, the title ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’ appears four times on the pillars of the broad hall,79 and the title ‘overseer of chamberlains’ also recurs.80

70 Naville and Hall 1913, pl. 10 [Be]; Kitchen 1980, 18 [9].


72 Gaballa 1974, 16 [A], fig. 1, pl. 3 [bottom left]; Kitchen 1980, 15 [8] (cf. 16 [16]). The titles $\text{hm-ntr Mfr}$ and $\text{imy-r imyw-hnt n nb tswy}$ reappear on the right side of the statue (Gaballa 1974, 18–19, fig. 4, pl. 3 [top right]; Kitchen 1980, 16 [3]), and $\text{hm-ntr Mfr}$ recurs moreover on the front (Gaballa 1974, 17–19, fig. 3, pl. 3 [top left]; Kitchen 1980, 15 [13]).

73 Gaballa 1974, 19 [E], fig. 5, pl. 3 [bottom right]; Kitchen 1980, 16 [7]. Cf. Traunecker 2009, 39, nn. 105–6. $\text{Wrt-t}>hkw$ is written with the determinatives of the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, also seen, e.g., on block statue Louvre A 92 from late Dynasty 25 or early Dynasty 26 (Perdu 2012, 124 [B]).

74 Daressy 1893, 172 [66]; Borchardt 1925, 109–10, pl. 95; Kitchen 1980, 20 [14]; PM II$^2$, 375.

75 PM III$^2$, 838.


77 Lieblein 1892, 801 [2089]; Kitchen 1980, 34 [2]. Lieblein’s record, copied without query by Kitchen, suggests a title $\text{imy-r hmtyw n nb tswy}$. However, no such title is attested elsewhere, and this is undoubtedly a misreading of $\text{imy-r imyw-hnt n nb tswy}$, for which compare our entries 3b, 3d and 3f. A crudely carved $\text{ t}$ is easily mistaken for $\text{y}$, and small simple signs such as $\text{w}$ and $\text{ t}$ can resemble plural dots or strokes.

78 Koefoed-Petersen 1936, 12 [50]; Koefoed-Petersen 1950, 36, pl. 72; Kitchen 1980, 21 [5]; Jørgensen 1998, 208–9 [80].


80 Kitchen 1975, 299 [10]; 1980, 9 [3].
(4) On wooden statue base Cairo CG 806 (JE 21871) of Hriri called Rc, found at Saqqara and from the New Kingdom, he bears the titles hm-ntr Wr(t)-hk3w imy-hnt, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau and chamberlain’. 81

(5) On the back wall of the rear chapel 82 of the temple of Maat at Karnak, the vizier Wnn-nfr, of the reign of Ramesses XI, 83 also bears the title hm-ntr tpy n Wr-t-hk3w, ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’.

Clearly, the priestly title of ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’ is closely associated with the king’s chamberlains (four out of five of these priests were chamberlains) and with the crowning of the king. Apparently these chamberlains placed the crown on the king’s head. 84 The goddess Werethekau is often depicted participating in coronation scenes. 85 Werethekau’s priests represented her divine presence at these crowning ceremonies.

Interestingly, the evidence listed above reveals the lack of evidence for female ‘god’s servants’ of Werethekau, as opposed to the female ‘god’s servants’ of, notably, Hathor and Neith. 86 Perhaps the Werethekau priests were too intimately connected with the state bureaucracy; women had in any case less access to priestly offices from the New Kingdom onwards. 87 The evidence listed above shows that no women held priestly titles in relation to Werethekau. However, women joined the temples as chantresses and musicians shaking the sistrum, participating in certain rituals (see the chantress of Osiris, Isis, Mut, Horus on Abydos stelae above), 88 and there are other cases over the centuries in which women held priestly titles. 89 This leaves the question why women could not serve as priestesses for Werethekau. Perhaps this was due to the fact that ‘officials shared in the power of the king, and that only a male could represent the male sun on earth’. 90

Did Werethekau have temples?

The various sources discussed above prove that Werethekau had her own priests. We shall now consider four sources that show that Werethekau had her own place, or places, of worship, even though none is attested directly by the archaeological record.

81 Borchardt 1930, 103, pl. 149; Chadefaud 1982, 103.
82 Kitchen 1983, 841 [7].
84 Barbotin 1999, 21 [1]; Daoud 1994, 204; Gardiner 1953, 26; Quirke 2004, 34.
89 Fischer 1982, 1102–3; Gosline 1996, 26, n. 6, and 34–36.
90 Quirke 1999, 227.
(1) The earliest source is the tomb of the chamberlain Imn-Htp at Qurna from the reign of Amenhotep III, already cited above. 91 According to one of its inscriptions, irf hssst m Pr-Wrt-hkbw, ‘he did what is favoured in the temple of Werethekau’. 92 As we saw, he was a chamberlain and (following Helck’s reconstruction) a ‘[first god’s servant] of Werethekau’, who had the responsibility of crowning and adorning the king in the palace. 93 Also, he is described as shkr nswt m pr-wr šḥb nb tiwy m pr-nsr, ‘one who adorned the king in the per-wer shrine and made festive the lord of the Two Lands in the per-neser’. 94

(2) The second source to refer to a temple of Werethekau is the diorite stelophorous statue Louvre E 25980 of the vizier Pa-sr (temp. late Seti I or early Ramesses II), 95 who, as we learned from other sources, held the title of ‘first god’s servant of Werethekau’ (the title does not appear on this statue). Its provenance is not recorded; Barbotin thinks it may be from Memphis, 96 although it was previously suggested that it may be from Qantir. 97 Four deities are represented on the stela: Neith (ḥnwit tiwy, ‘mistress of the Two Lands’), Ptah (nb mḥt ‘l pḥty, ‘lord of justice, great of strength’), Sekhmet (nfrt mrt Pḥt, ‘the beautiful one, beloved of Ptah’), and Werethekau (nḥt ‘ḥḥt, ‘lady of the palace’). Neith stands on the right of the stela, facing the other three deities. 98 ‘The left edge of the stela bears an offering formula dedicated to Werethekau and Neith: htp-di-nswt Wrt-hkw Nt wrt nbt S3w di.s(n) rw† rl n.r s[r.s[n], ‘An offering-that-the-king-gives of Werethekau and Neith the great, lady of Sais: may they cause my name to prosper in their temple.’ 99 The text indicates that Werethekau and Neith had a temple (r-pr) at an unspecified location. El-Sayed identified this location as Pr-Wrt-hkbw, which Habachi has located at Kafr ed-Deir, a site between Bubastis and Athribis. 100 El-Sayed notes that this temple would chiefly have been devoted to Werethekau, but that it probably hosted secondary cults for Neith, Ptah, and Sekhmet. 101

(3) Our third source is a block statuette of undocumented provenance that belongs to PyiAy, a contemporary of Ramesses II (now in a private collection in Lyons). 102 A text on the right side of the statue invokes Werethekau and mentions a temple of hers that, according to the inscriptions, should be in or close to the district of Memphis: 103 Wrt-hkbw imi wi m pr(t) m-hnw.f r’ nb imi wḏt(i) hḥ nḥy.f sbbىw n it-in im r hpt.(i) m ʾnh-tiwy smyt nt ḫsww, ‘O Werethekau, let me be at <your> temple, inside it, daily. Let me be well at its doors, without

91 PM I 4, 456 [C. I].
92 Loret 1884, 28.
93 Loret 1884, notably 30; Helck 1958, 1938 [9–12].
94 Loret 1884, 27, l. 38; Gardiner 1953, 26.
96 Barbotin 1999, 20 [1].
97 El-Sayed 1975, 34; Kitchen 1980, 10 [8].
98 Barbotin 1999, 20 [1a].
100 Habachi 1967, 35–36.
101 El-Sayed 1975, 34.
103 Clère 1968, 146–47.
being moved back and forth there, until (I) rest in (the necropolis of) Ankhtawy, the district of the favoured ones.  

(4) The last object known to document that Werethekau had a cult place is the statue of Mr-mAy of late Dynasty 25 or early Dynasty 26 (Cairo TR 22.10.48.15). This statue was found at Kafr ed-Deir (Markaz Minia el-Kamh, Sharqiya Governorate). An offering formula on the statue invokes Werethekau, nbt ʿḥt hry(t)-ib Sp3(t)-Hpwt, ‘mistress of the palace, who resides in the District of Kheput’, together with Mryt-Rā. As noted by Habachi, the District of Kheput may have included Kafr ed-Deir and the area between it and Kafr Saqr. Mr-mAy and his eldest son Rā-tAy.f-nxt (t), who dedicated the statue, both bore the title hm-ntr Pḥ hry-ib Pr-Wrt-hkĪw, ‘god’s servant of Ptah, who resides in the temple of Werethekau’ (Pr-Wrt-hkĪw). Habachi identifies Pr-Wrt-hkĪw with Kafr ed-Deir, the modern village built on the ancient site. It would seem that Pr-Wrt-hkĪw was a large temple and that Ptah had a shrine or chapel inside this temple. The observed close relationship between Werethekau and Ptah may support this argument. Werethekau is depicted behind Ptah and Sekhmet on statue Louvre E 25980 of the vizier P3-sr. In the temple of Ramesses II at Wadi es-Sebua, a pair of hieroglyphic columns refers to the king as ‘beloved of Ptah’ and ‘beloved of Werethekau’, recalling the close connection between Ptah and Werethekau. The depiction of Werethekau behind Ptah on a stela in Abu Simbel points in the same direction.

To summarise, the various objects that have been discussed make clear that Werethekau did enjoy her own cult and worship, and that she was served by priests and temples in various places. The texts and her representations show that she was acknowledged as an independent deity at least as early as Dynasty 18. This follows from the mention of a temple of hers in the tomb of Imn-Htp at Qurna, from the reign of Amenhotep III. Her standard epithet ‘lady of the palace’ confirms that independence. The close connection between the priests of Werethekau and chamberlains is explained by the latter’s involvement with crowning ceremonies. Chamberlains crowned and robed the king, and Werethekau was associated with the cobra, the Upper Egyptian crown, the Lower Egyptian crown, and the two

105 Habachi 1967, 40.
106 Habachi 1967, 30–33.
109 Habachi 1967, 35.
110 Cf. the cult of Anubis in the temple of Senusert II at Lahun (Quirke 1997; Quirke 2004, 120), and the cult of Anubis and Hathor in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri.
111 Barbotin 1999, 20–21 [1].
112 Gauthier 1912, 27.
113 Maspero 1911, 157, pl. 163; PM VII, 98 [6].
114 Erman 1911, 35 [9,1], 48 [16,3–4 and 17,2], 50 [18,1 and 18,23]; CT VII, 58 [1]; Pyr. 1795 [a].
115 Simpson 1974, pl. 61 [ANOC 42.2], l. 7; CT I, 183 [g]; Pyr. 1820 [a], 1832 [b].
116 Pyr. 194 [c], 195 [d–e], 196 [b].
crows combined. The inscriptions on Bristol H 514 indicate that the offering scene is led by a god’s servant of Werethekau, not by a god’s servant of Osiris, although Osiris is the most prominent character on the stela. Priests of the goddess Werethekau are attested for Dynasties 18 to 26, including one ‘pure-priest’ (w)b, one ‘chief of pure-priests’ (f*n w*b(w)), eight ‘god’s servants’ (hm-ntr), and five ‘first god’s servants’ (hm-ntr tpy). Depictions such as found on this stela show Werethekau’s status as a full deity, especially because she appears as a female complement to a wide range of male deities. Her present combination with Osiris may be compared with similar depictions of Isis, Nephthys, Hathor and Maat. However, the Bristol stela is the only source that represents her on which the supplicant is a priest of this goddess, a ‘god’s servant of Werethekau’.

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Fig. 1: Votive stela of P(A)-n-Inn, with cobra-headed Werethekau. Bristol H 514. Photo: courtesy Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives.
Fig. 2: Wall scene including Werethekau with cobra head. Mortuary temple of Merenptah, Qurna. After Jaritz et al. 1999, 45, fig. 13.

Fig. 3: Scene including Werethekau with cobra head in the temple of Medinet Habu, exterior south wall, west of second pylon. After Epigraphic Survey 1964, pl. 578 [A].
Fig. 4: Scene including Werethekau with cobra head. Northern face of west wing of 8th pylon, Karnak. Photo: Kenneth Griffin.

Fig. 5: Scene including cobra-headed Werethekau in the temple of Hibis, room J, west wall. After Davies 1953, pl. 21.
Fig. 6: Werethekau, originally with cobra head, suckling a child. Cairo CG 42002. Photo: courtesy Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
Fig. 7: Votive stela of [...]-tawy, with cobra-headed Werethekau (left). London UC 14406. Photo: courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.
Fig. 8: Stela of T3-mwt-ḥfr(t) with cobra-headed Isis-Werethkau (centre). Cairo TR 11.11.24.3. Photo: courtesy Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
Fig. 9: Stela of [...]/y, offering flowers to the cobra-headed Werethekau. Cairo TR 14.3.25.14. Photo: courtesy Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
Fig. 10: Stela of Mr(t)-ḥt with Werethkau and the triad of Osiris, Horus and Isis. Cairo JE 18527. Photo: courtesy Egyptian Museum, Cairo.