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STELA OF MENEKH RECENTLY UNCOVERED AT THE TEMPLE OF KOM OMBO

BY

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ABSTRACT

[AR]

لوحة منخ المكتشفة حديثاً في معبد كوم أمبو

الورقة البحثية الحالية هي دراسة تفصيلية للوحة خاصة، اكتشفت أثناء أعمال الحفائر التي أجريت في معبد كوم أمبو، بالتوازي مع مشروع خفض منسوب المياه الجوفية الذي أقيم حديثاً في محيط معبد كوم أمبو عام 2018، لمنع تسرب المياه و لوقف خطر الأملاح على أساسات المعبد. قاد الأعمال الأثرية فريق عمل من المجلس الأعلى للآثار. وقد تم اكتشاف العديد من اللقى الأثرية خلال ذلك، وهي لقي مهمة في تحديد تاريخ الموقع الأثري. وتم تقسيم اللقى وفقاً لموقعها داخل المعبد، ويتناول هذا البحث المجموعة الأولى من اللقى، والتي اكتشفت تحت أرضية بيت الولادة (الماميي). وتلك المجموعة تتكون من تماثيل لصقر، وتمثال كتلة. والبحث يتناول القطعة الثالثة وهي لوحة خاصة صغيرة الحجم، وصنعت من الحجر الجيري، تحمل نقوش ومناظر تقودنا إلى الاعتقاد بوجود جبانة أفراد قريبة من المعبد، والنقوش وطريقة كتابتها تشير إلى أنها تعود إلى عصر الدولة الحديثة.

[EN] This research is a detailed study of a private stela discovered in 2018 during excavations carried out at the temple of Kom Ombo by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquity. The excavations were undertaken in conjunction with the groundwater lowering project within the temple enclosure to prevent the capillary rise of water and salt attack on the temple foundations. Many finds have been uncovered; they are helpful for establishing the chronology of the site. The objects are divided into three groups according to the location where they were uncovered in the temple. This paper deals with a funerary private stela uncovered underneath the paving slabs of the Ptolemaic birth house (*Mammisi*). It is of small size, made of limestone, bearing both figures and inscriptions, which suggests the existence of a private cemetery nearby the temple. The inscriptions and its paleography suggest that this stela dates to the early New Kingdom.

KEYWORDS: Birth house, stela, groundwater project, archaeological team, private cemetery, chronology, New Kingdom.

I. INTRODUCTION

A stela [FIGURE 1] was discovered in 2018 by the Egyptian team of inspectors of Kom Ombo Antiquities area. It was discovered under the pavement of the birth house (*Mammisi*) of the Ptolemaic Temple of Kom Ombo during the excavations in conjunction with the project for lowering the groundwater level within the temple enclosure, which in turn was conducted to prevent the capillary rise of water and resulting salt attack on the temple foundations.

II. DESCRIPTION

Material: fine limestone [FIGURE 1]

Height: 40 cm. (maximum)

Width: 27 cm.

Depth: 6 cm.

Patina: Medium.

Back: Roughly hammered, some vertical chisel marks.

State of Preservation: quite good, somewhat eroded by natural processes, the upper left quarter missing.



[FIGURE 1]: Funerary Stele of Menekh © Photographed by Mostafa Badawi

The study focuses on a fine limestone round-topped funerary stela. It is divided into three sections. The lunette is occupied by a pair of *wḏ3t* – eyes (one is missing now) in raised relief. It is supposed to be one of two symmetrical mirrored *wḏ3t* - eyes¹, a typical sign of protection for the deceased, usually depicted on the top of such funeral stelae².




Below the *wḏ3t* – eyes is a scene in low raised relief showing a standing man and a women behind him. The man offers to a seated figure, only partially preserved, to the left. The man is accompanied by the caption “ka priest” «*hm-k3*»³. His name (*Nb*) *t3wy* is recorded above his head. He pours a libation from a round-bottom vessel with his right hand onto a low offering table, while his left hand elevates an offering of a fowl and a round bread loaf on a small stand.

He is followed by a lady named: *hdt*, she has the title: *nbt pr* «mistress of the house», who is supposed to be his wife.⁴ She holds a triangular loaf in her right hand, which reads: *di*, meaning give or offer⁵.

To the left is a seated figure. The upper part of his body is missing. It is supposed to be the deceased, owner of this stela. He is seated on a lion-legged chair, used by high-ranking people and wearing a long tight cloak. His name, *Mnh*,⁶ is given in the offering formula in the lower register.

The lowest register has three lines of hieroglyphic text.

Text [FIGURE 2]

The upper part of the stela is occupied by one of the original two *Wḏ3t* eyes , with text *ptr nfrw* “seeing the splendor⁷. The standing male figure is surmounted by a hieroglyphic line bearing his name  reading [*Nb*] *t3wy*. Here, the *nb* sign is missing, although it is given in the text below. The female figure is surmounted by her name and title:  *nbt pr hdt*

The lower register of the stela has three horizontal lines of hieroglyphic text, running as follows:

³ ERMAN & GRAPOW, (EDS.): *Wb*, 3, 90; FAULKNER 1991: 14; DOXEY 2001: 71; LESKO 2002: 310.

⁴ The Title *nbt pr* was attributed only to the married ladies since the Middle Kingdom. ERMAN, & GRAPOW, (EDS.): *Wb*, 2: 232; WARD 1986: 8; FEUCHT 2001: 503; AL-^cAYEDI 2006: 285- 286.

⁵ GARDINER 1971: 533; WILFONG 2001: 342; TYLDESLEY 2006: 12-13.

⁶ RANKE, *PN* 1, 153.3

⁷ The word *ptr* was written with the two eyes during the Middle Kingdom, and appeared again during the Ramesside period. *KRI*, 5, 51, *Urk* 1794: vol.4, 14; FAULKNER 1991: 96; LESKO 2002: 159.



1- *htp di nsw Wsir hk3 dt nb nhh hr ib 3b(dw)*

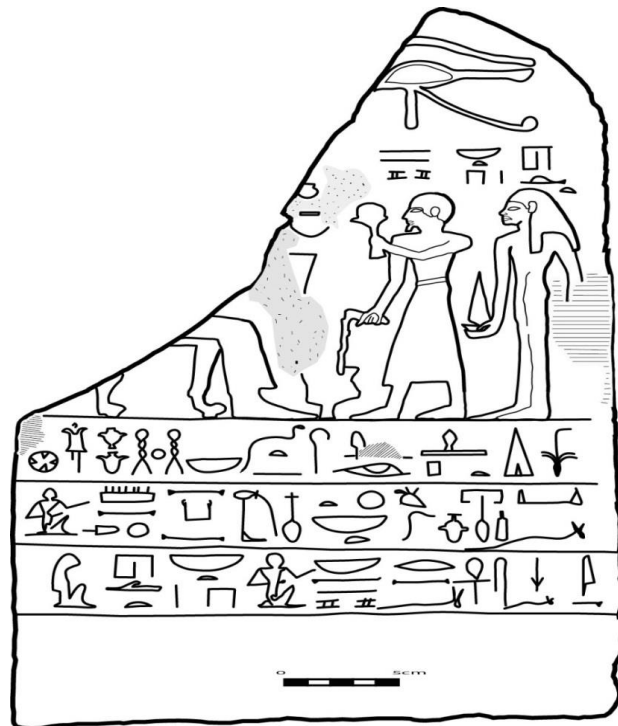


2- *di.f prt hrw t hnk3 k3w 3bdw ht nbt nfrt w^cb(t) n k3 n Mn^h*



3- *in sn.f s^cnh rn.f Nb-twy nbt pr Hdt*

- 1- An offering (which) the King gives (to) Osiris, Ruler of Eternity, Lord of Perpetuity, who is in Abydos.
- 2- That he may give a voice of offerings consisting of bread, beer, ox, fowl, (and) every good (and) pure thing, for the *k3* of *Menekh*.
 - 2- It is his son, Neb-tawy who causes his name to live, (and the) lady of the house *Hedet*.



[FIGURE 2]: Funeral Stele of Menekh © Facsimile by Sayed Elrekaby

III. COMMENTARY

The text reproduced on this stela includes common formulae that suggests it came from a private funeral cult-center, perhaps near the temple where cults had been performed by the deceased's eldest son, or a soul servant priest, called *hm k3*⁸. where a lot of funeral stelae were scattered and reused as part of the foundations of the actual temple.

The above suggestion is supported by finding reused blocks with the name of Thutmose III, Ramesses II and Ramesses III in the temple⁹. They were found incised on sandstone blocks reused in the building of the Ptolemaic birth house and the front quay. These blocks may be from the New Kingdom temple that stood on the site.

The writing of the *hṯp-di-nsw formula* is typical of the Eighteenth Dynasty onward¹⁰. *ḥk3 dt, nb nhḥ* and *nb 3bdw* are among the common epithets distinguishing Osiris¹¹. The sacred name of Osiris is written in a later form with the portable chair, which appeared at the end of the Middle Kingdom¹².

The text is reproduced in a precise cursive hieroglyphic calligraphy, manifested in many cursive signs, such as: *n, f* and *w^cb*, the ripples have entirely disappeared and it could be identified throughout the context, typical of the New Kingdom¹³.

The personal names suggest a date to this stela, which lies within the Middle, or the New Kingdoms¹⁴. According to the arrangement of the scenes with regard to the texts, it is supposed to date this stela to the first half of the Eighteenth Dynasty,¹⁵. It confirms a preceding New Kingdom necropolis at Kom Ombo, before the present Ptolemaic temple was erected on the same spot.

⁸ GARDINER 1971: 170 – 173; COLLIER 1998: 35- 36.

⁹ PM 6, 199.

¹⁰ SMITHER 1939: 34-37.

¹¹ BUDGE 1898: 321, 322; HART 2005: 118.

¹² BUDGE 1914: PL. 19, 44; STEWART 1916: PL. 14:4; *Urk* vol.4, 77, 209; BENNETT 1941: 78.

¹³ FISCHER 1999: 10-11.

¹⁴ RANKE 1935: 153:3, 186: 22- 23; 231: 19, 21.

¹⁵ STEWART 1916: 256; HÖLZL 2001: 320-322.

IV. CONCLUSION

This stela, together with the adjacent findings, discovered may have been it could be assumed that it has been part of the adjustment to the birth house foundations, as the Nile inundation affected harmfully the temple bases. Along with the other findings, uncovered during excavation works, it could be concluded that earlier structures had been dismantled and reused as part of the foundations of the actual temple.

Utilizing the artistic criteria of the stela discussed above, along with the depth of the spot in which it was uncovered, the existence of an intensive New Kingdom cult center could be confirmed, attached to the local god Sobek, appended with a necropolis in the neighboring area. It also confirms the existence of New Kingdom buildings prior to the standing Ptolemaic temple. The earlier temple fell into pieces and its blocks were reused in the foundations of the Ptolemaic temple complex.

The writer and the archaeological team recommend doing a comprehensive excavation in the temple enclosure and the neighboring areas to make further discoveries that might reveal more about the earlier history of the ancient city of Kom Ombo and its temple.

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