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An Unpublished Stele from Tell Basta

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An Unpublished Stele from Tell Basta

AIMAN ASHMAWY ALI

During the SCA's excavations at Tell Basta held in the nineteen sixties, many private stelae were discovered, some dating back to the Old Kingdom[1] and others to the New Kingdom.[2] Most of the monuments discovered at Tell Basta were moved to Cairo with the register book, while some others were chosen to be exhibited in the Herya Museum (Sharkia Governorate), which is actually the case of the stele we intend to study in this article and which is since preserved in the museum (inv. no. 705 / registered Tell Basta no. 688). This stele was discovered by Shafik Farid in 1962, together with three other stelae, in some southern part debris of the so-called palace of Tell Basta.[3]

I. General Description

It is a round-topped limestone stele with figures in shallow sunk relief and incised hieroglyphs belonging to an individual called *S3-ḥq3t.*

Height: 28 cm; width: 22,5 cm; thickness: 4 cm.

The lunette of the stele is decorated with a *shen*-ring and a cup flanked by two *wedjat*-eyes; on the right half below, is a representation of the owner of the stele, seated on a lion-legged

1 M.I. Bakr, *Tell Basta* I. *Tombs and Burial Customs at Bubastis*, Cairo, 1992, p. 92-101.

2 L. Habachi, *Tell Basta*, *CASAE* 22, 1957, pl. 38-A.

3 The building, first understood by the excavator as a Middle Kingdom temple (see Sh. Farid, "Preliminary Report on the Excavations of the Antiquities Department at Tell Basta (Season 1961)", *ASAE* 58, 1964, p. 90, fig. 4, and pl. 12) has been then reinterpreted as a Middle Kingdom palace (Ch.C. Van Siclen III, "Remarks on the Middle Kingdom Palace at Tell Basta", in M. Bietak (ed.), *House and Palace in Ancient Egypt*, Vienna, 1996, p. 239-246; Chr. Tietze , M. Abd El Maksoud, *Tell Basta, A Guide to the Site*, Potsdam, 2004, p. 18-20); the archeological and topographical evidences prove that the early interpretation of the building as a temple is accurate (subject of a further study).

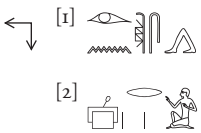
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chair with a high backrest. He wears a wig with short curls, a collar and a long kilt. With his right hand he brings a lotus flower to his nose, while his left hand rests on his knee; his feet lie on a small pillow. Before him is an offering table heaped with bread, meat and onions. His name is written in a column, before his face:



Sꜣ-ḥqꜣt
Sa-heqat

In front of *Sa-heqat* stands another man, smaller in size, wearing a wig with short curls and a short kilt. He is pouring libations from a *ḫs*-vase in his right hand and offering incense with his left hand. Before his face, two vertical lines of hieroglyphs mention his name and title:



[1] *ỉr ỉn šmsw*
[2] *Sr*
made by (his) follower Ser

The lower part of the stele contains a hieroglyphic inscription in three lines:



[1] *dỉ nswt ḥtp Ptḥ Skr Wsỉr nṯr ꜥꜣ ḥqꜣ ḏt dỉ.f pr(t) ḫrw t ḥnqt kꜣw*
[2] *ꜣpdw ḫt nbt nfr(t) wꜥb(t) ꜥnḫ nṯr ỉm.sn <di.f> snn ṯꜣw nḏm m ḥtp n kꜣ n*
[3] *Sꜣ-ḥqꜣt ỉn sn.f sꜥnḫ rn.f šmsw Sr*

[1] *May the king gives to Ptah-Sokar-Osiris the great god, lord of eternity, so that he may give invocation-offerings of bread, beer, cattle,* [2] *birds, every good and pure thing which the god lives on, (and that he may give) the breathing of sweet air in peace, to the ka of* [3] *Sa-heqat, it's his brother who revives his name the follower Ser.*

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II. Dating the Stele

The stele was discovered in a layer of debris, 50 cm above the southern rooms of the so-called Middle Kingdom palace, which suggests a date for the stele after the palace destruction.

The monument bears many late Middle Kingdom or early New Kingdom features, viz.:

– the shape of the lunette, not fully semicircular but just a little bit curvy and forming an angle clearly separating the top of the stele from its lower part, belongs to the typical type II as defined by R. Hölzl, dated to the 13th dynasty and later;[4]

– the place of the *shen*-ring between the *wedjat*-eyes, being even slightly above them, is typical of the 18th dynasty;[5]

– the figures separating the lunette from the text below is typical of New Kingdom style;[6]

– the written form of *nṯr ꜥꜣ*, immediately following the name Osiris, the phrase "which the god lives on", as well as the name Ptah-Sokar-Osiris are typical of a very late period in the Middle Kingdom and after;[7]

– the written form of *dỉ nswt ḥtp*, a type II feature as defined by P.C. Smither,[8] is in use in graffiti belonging to the "documentary culture" since the reign of Amenemhat II, but on private votive monuments emblematic of the "hieroglyphic culture" only from the end of the 13th dynasty to the end of the 17th dynasty;[9]

– the written form of *snn*, derived from the verb *sn* "to breathe", is only attested from the New Kingdom onwards;[10]

– the owner's name *Sꜣ-ḥqꜣt* is not attested with this form in *PN*,[11] but on the other hand, a man called *Sr* is known under the New Kingdom.[12]

Thus, all the above-mentioned characteristics suggest that the stele was probably made around the end of the Second Intermediate Period or early New Kingdom.

III. General Comments

The style of the stele, of mediocre workmanship, clearly shows a provincial art, despite the fact that it should have belonged to a member of the elite. Indeed, it is one of the few stelae discovered among the hundreds of tombs excavated at Tell Basta belonging to different

4 R. Hölzl, "Round-Topped Stelae from the Middle Kingdom to the Late Period. Some Remarks on the Decoration of the Lunettes", in *Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia*, *Atti*, Torino, 1991, p. 285-286.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

6 E. Sullivan ,"Stele of Nebnakht and family", in E. Hornung, B. M. Brayan (eds.) *The Quest for Immortality , Treasures of Ancient Egypt, Catalogue of an Exhibition Held in National Gallery of Art, Washington, 12 May-25 September 2002,* p.93, p. 93, no. 12 (early 18th Dynasty).

7 C.J.C. Bennett, "Growth of the *Ḥtp-Dỉ-nsw* Formula in the Middle Kingdom", *JEA* 27, 1941, p. 79-81.

8 P.C. Smither, "The Writing of ḤTP- *D'I* -NSW in Middle and New Kingdoms", *JEA* 25, 1939, p. 34-37.

9 P. Vernus, "Sur les graphies de la formule 'l'offrande que donne le Roi' au Moyen Empire et à la Deuxième Période Intermédiaire", in St. Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, New Malden, 1991, p. 141-151.

10 *Wb*. IV 153; for a parallel to the formula *dỉ.f ḏꜣw nḏm m ḥtp*, see, for instance, K*RI* I, 380, 13.

11 In *PN* I, 284, 1, a *Sꜣ-ḥqꜣ* is known (MK), whereas in *PN* I, 292, 6, a *Sꜣt-ḥqꜣỉt* is known (18th dyn.[?]).

12 *PN* I, 316, 23.

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classes of the society. The small number of stelae found on location would then indicate that possession of such votive monuments was reserved to a city elite.

While the general writing is rather cursive, the man-sign used as determinative in the personal names and the *n*-sign are closer to hieratic.

IV. The Formula "to Cause His Name to Live"

The importance of the stele arises from the fact that the formula to perpetuate the owner's name is not made by his son, as it is usually done, but by his brother. This point ought to be assessed under two aspects.

The Actors of the Ritual and Those to Whom it is Performed

The formula *ỉn sꜣ.f sˁnḫ rn.f* "it is his son who revives his name" is found as early as Middle Kingdom till the end of the pharaonic period,[13] leading it to be considered as the most common ancient Egyptian formula beside the *dỉ nswt ḥtp*.

Other members of the family were also able to perform the formula over many of their relatives. As well as the son who was responsible for reviving his mother's name,[14] the daughter could also cause her father's[15] and mother's names to live.[16] In some cases, the son and the daughter are both represented on the same stele reviving their parents' names: the son then revives his father's name while the daughter revives her mother's name.[17] From time to time, the grandson is likewise portrayed reviving his grandfathers' names,[18] as the wife can revive her husband's name[19] and vice versa.[20]

Following that pattern, childless people were often praised by a brother,[21] as it is the case on the stele Tell Basta no. 688. Besides, other examples can be found in which a sister,[22] a loyal follower[23] or a woman reviving her sister's name are depicted.[24]

13 *Wb*. IV, 47, 2; a variant, *r.n sꜣ.f r sˁnḫ rn.f (Wb.* IV, 47, 4), was also used from the Ramesside period onwards; for the grammatical interpretation of this late form, see J.M. Kruchten, "Une adaptation 'libyenne' de la formule *ỉn sꜣ.f sˁnḫ rn.f*", *GM* 121, 1991, p. 72-73.

14 Statue Cairo CG 1215, see L. Borchardt, *CGC*, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten no. 1-1294*, V, no. 951-1294, Berlin, 1934, p. 112; stele BM EA 1680, see *HTBM* 10, 1982, p. 41, pl. 97; K*RI* III, 306,6; *ibid.*, 650,14; *ibid.*, 677,1, 812,4; K*RI* I, 336,3.

15 H.M. Stewart, *Egyptian Stelae, Reliefs and Paintings from the Petrie Collection,* II. *Archaic Period to Second Intermediate Period*, Warminster, 1979, p. 24, no. 101, pl. 24; W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Tombs of the Courtiers and Oxyrhynkhos*, *BSAE* 37, 1925, p. 11, pl. 27.

16 H.M. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 25, no. 105, pl. 25,4; T.G. Allen, *Egyptian Stelae in Field Museum of Natural History*, Chicago, 1936, p. 27, pl. 10; A.H. Gardiner, "A Stele of the Early Eighteenth Dynasty from Thebes", *JEA* 3, 1916, p. 256, pl. 40; K*RI* III, 579,7.

17 A. Wiese, *Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig: Die ägyptische Abteilung*, Mainz, 2001, p. 143, no. 100.

18 K*RI* I, 392,10; *Urk*. IV, 128 ; Stele Cairo CG 1107, see L. Borchardt, *op.cit.*, p. 60-61.

19 H.M. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 27, no. 114, pl. 28,4; R.A. Fazzini *et al.*, *Ancient Egyptian Art in the Brooklyn Museum*, New York, 1989, no. 33.

20 T. G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 26, pl. 9.

21 H.M. Stewart, *Egyptian Stelae, Reliefs and Paintings, Part One, the New Kingdom*, London, 1976, p. 25, pl. 14,$_4$; *id. Part Two*, p. 26, pl. 27,$_2$; *HTBM* IV, London, 1913, pl. 45; E. Scamuzzi, *L'art égyptien au musée de Turin* , Paris, Hachette, 1966, pl. 53; K*RI* III, 451,$_{12}$.

22 H.M. Stewart, *op. cit.*, II, p. 33, pl. 35,1.

23 P. Ramond, "Les stèles égyptiennes du musée G. Labit à Toulouse", *BdE* 62, 1977, p. 1-3, pl. 1, fig. 2.

24 K*RI*, III, 57,8.

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Kings and members of the royal family could also revive their fathers' and brothers' names,[25] leading us to consider that kings' lists inscribed on temple walls might have acted the same way as the ritual did, causing the past kings' names to live.

Aspects of Reviving the Name

In ancient Egypt, children were one of the most precious things a man could get: "Take a wife while you're young/That she makes a son for you/…. Happy the man whose people are many/ He is missed on account of his progeny" says a man to his son,[26] or in other words: "a son is effective (*3ḫ*) to his father",[27] a common phrase in Egyptian texts. Firstly, the child was considered as an extension of his father on earth: people always remember the latter when they see or name the former. This idea occupies a great part of the social believes of modern Egyptians who still nowadays prefer to have a male child in order to perpetuate their name. Egyptian proverbs such as (اللى خلف ما ماتش) "the one who has a child never dies" and some popular songs[28] are also good witnesses of this belief.

On the other hand, the son revives his father's name by preserving his monuments or finishing the buildings he started, including his tomb, by keeping on making offerings to his *ka*, and especially by causing "his name to live in the speech of men and lasting in the speech of the livings";[29] so "the man whose name is spoken remains alive".[30]

25 K*RI* I, 111,15; *Urk* IV, 12,10, 13,1-3; as for the revival of the name of the god by the king, see, for instance, *Urk* IV, 807,15, 812,16.

26 *Instruction of Any*, 16, 1,3 (Ramesside period), see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. A Book of Reading.* II. *The New Kingdom*, p. 135-146.

27 J. Assmann, "Das Bild des Vaters im Alten Ägypten", in H. Tellenbach (ed.), *Das Vaterbild in Mythos und Geschichte. Ägypten, Griechenland, Altes Testament, Neues Testament*, 1976, p. 29-49; on the notion of *3ḫ* working out "through the father-son relationship", see Fl. Friedman, "The Root-Meaning of *3ḫ*: Effectiveness or Luminosity", *Serapis* 8, 1984-1985, p. 41.

28 G. Maspero, "Chansons populaires recueillies dans la Haute-Égypte de 1900 à 1914 pendant les inspections du Service des Antiquités", *ASAE* 14, 1914, p. 167-168.

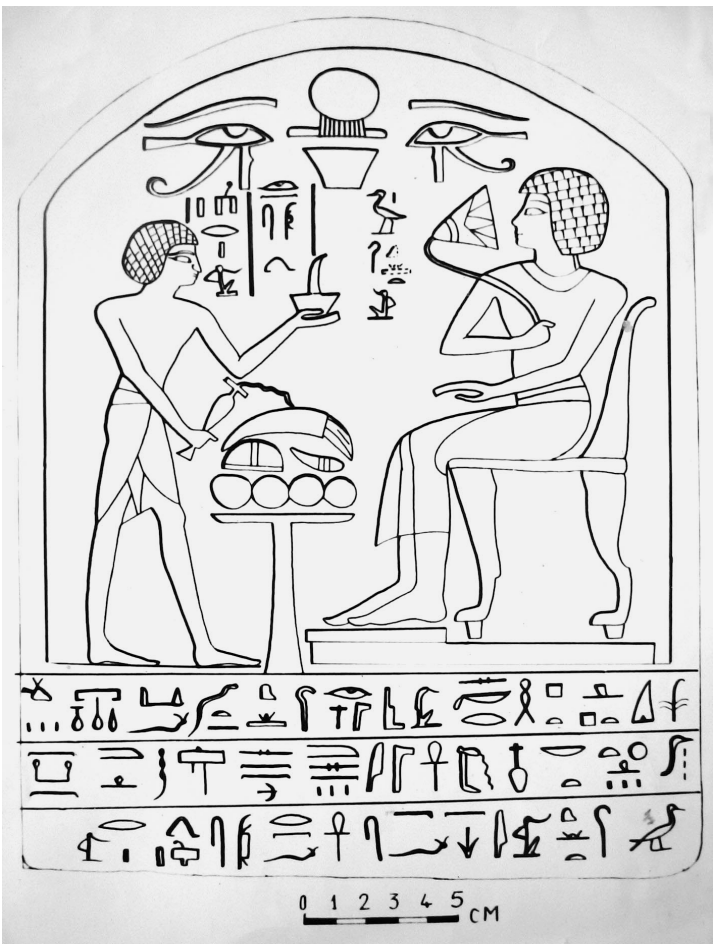
29 *Urk* VII, 33,14-15; W.K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry,* Cairo, 2003, p. 424.

30 Torino, Magical Papyrus, *Isis and Re*, see W. Pleyte, Fr. Rossi, *Papyrus de Turin*, Leyden, 1869, pl. 37, l. 12; A.T.W. Budge, *Legends of Gods: the Egyptian Texts*, *BEgChald* 32, 1912, p. 52.

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1.



2.

FIG. 1-2. Stele Tell Basta no.688 (courtesy SCA).

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