

Art and Faith in Stone: A Study of Eight Unpublished Coptic Funerary Stelae Housed in Abu al-Jud Storehouse, Luxor, Egypt

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واماكن إنتاجها وتاريخها بشكل أوضح، ولذا اتبعت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي والتحليلي والمقارن.

Abstract:

This study provides documentation of eight unpublished Coptic funerary stelae, which are kept in Abu al-Jud Storehouse in Luxor, Egypt. Their inventory numbers are 220, 232, 270, 301, 307, and 340 includes three stelae. They are all made of local limestone. Their suggested date ranges from fifth to seventh centuries AD. They are characterized by geometrical decorations, floral motifs, bird depictions together with inscriptions in Greek Language. Descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods of research are adopted to provide a detailed description along with a comprehensive analytical study.

Keywords

Abu al-Jud storehouse, Coptic, eagle, funerary stelae, limestone.

المخلص:

توثق هذه الدراسة وتقدم تحليلاً مفصلاً لثمانية شواهد قبور جنازية قبطية غير منشورة، محفوظة حالياً بمخزن أبو الجود في مدينة الأقصر. وقد سُجِّلت هذه الشواهد تحت أرقام الجرد 220، 232، 270، 301، 307، بالإضافة إلى ثلاثة شواهد أخرى تحمل الرقم 340. نحتت جميعها من الحجر الجيري المحلي المتوفر في المنطقة، وهو ما يعكس اعتماد الورش الفنية القبطية على الموارد المتاحة في بيئتها المباشرة. ويرجع تاريخ هذه المجموعة إلى الفترة الممتدة من القرن السادس حتى القرن الثامن الميلادي. تتميز هذه الشواهد بزخارف رمزية متنوعة تجسد ملامح الفن الجنازي المسيحي، حيث تضم زخارف هندسية دقيقة، ونقوش نباتية متشابكة، بالإضافة إلى صور طيور تمثل رموزاً روحية. كما تشتمل على نصوص كتابية منقوشة باللغة اليونانية، مما يبرز استمرار استخدام اللغة اليونانية في السياقات الدينية والجنازية خلال هذه الحقبة. تهدف الدراسة إلى تقديم وصف تفصيلي دقيق لكل شاهد على حدة، مع تحليل العناصر الفنية والزخرفية التي تميزها، إضافة إلى دراسة النصوص المصاحبة لها من الناحية اللغوية والرمزية. وتسعى أيضاً إلى مقارنتها بشواهد مماثلة محفوظة في متاحف أخرى، وذلك من أجل تحديد أصولها

الكلمات الدالة:

حجر جيري، شواهد قبور، قبطي، مخزن ابوالجود بالأقصر، نسر.

Introduction

In ancient Egypt, funerary stelae were primarily sculptured to identify the deceased and preserve their memory through inscriptions and offering scenes.¹ The earliest known forms were the false door and round-topped stelae. Typically, they depicted the deceased seated before an offering table, receiving offerings from his family and later accompanied by gods.² During the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, the round-topped form predominated. Depictions reflect Greek influence and a tendency toward more naturalistic representation.³

Development of Coptic funerary stelae

Coptic funerary stelae continued to be functioned as grave markers. They are usually placed upright or horizontally over the graves. They have common forms such as round-topped, rectangular and triangular top-stelae.⁴ They are commonly decorated with Christian themes and inscriptions that reflect the religious faith, language, and funeral artistic decorations.⁵

The earliest examples of Coptic funerary stelae dated from the fourth century AD. They were primarily discovered in Alexandria and Fayum. Their manufacture increased from the fifth century onwards. During the seventh century their production spread throughout the Nile valley. A mass production discovered in upper Egypt and ranged in date between the eighth and tenth centuries. After the tenth century production of Coptic funerary stelae started to decline and the latest discovered examples were from Abydos, Esna and Aswan dated back to thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD.⁶

Materials of Coptic Funerary stelae

Funerary stelae are mostly made out of local limestone as predominant material, along with sandstone are commonly used. Less common materials including schist, marble, alabaster, Terracotta and wood.⁷

Inscriptions of Coptic Funerary stelae

Coptic stelae inscriptions include deceased's biography, and prayers. Both Greek or Coptic languages were used according to the date of production and geographical location. Certain phrases were frequently used in one region than in others.⁸ Not all the discovered stelae are inscribed with text; some have only Christian decorations without any inscriptions, others have only inscriptions and no Christian themes, and sometimes both styles were employed.⁹

Production centers of stelae in Upper Egypt

Upper Egypt funerary stelae have common distinctive features. They are characterized by arched or triangular tops resting on two columns as decorative frames forming a double or triple portal. Moreover, animal and birds' motifs are commonly incorporated with plant and floral designs.¹⁰ The cities of Armant¹¹, Esna¹², and Thebes¹³ were the major regional centers in upper Egypt for producing such stelae. Each of them has its distinctive design.

I. Armant stelae are well known for their simple designs. They are decorated with frames topped by a triangular form. Their decoration usually includes a wreathed cross, eagle, a triumphal Latin cross and a *ankh* cross. Also, a Christogram accompanied by Alpha and Omega letters. Their inscriptions commonly begin with an epitaph like "One is God, the Helper" inscribed on tabula ansata.¹⁴

II. Esna stelae are generally small in size with a rounded top. They are displaying an arched or triangular form supported on two columns with Corinthian capitals. Their master scene is an eagle with outstretched or raised wings. A simple foliate border surrounds the top part. Symmetrical birds or animals are often depicted in upper and lower parts, and sometimes within a horseshoe frame. Both Greek and Coptic Languages appear in the inscriptions of Esna stelae.¹⁵

III. Thebes stelae share similarities with those from Esna but are typically taller and exhibit more intricate flat-relief carvings. They are characterized by more elaborate decorations. Their characteristic themes include a hovering eagle bearing a wreath above the triangular form that encloses *ankh* cross.¹⁶

This research aims to document and publishe eight Coptic funerary stelae have been kept in Abu al-Jud Storehouse in Luxor city. Their inventory numbers are 220, 232, 270, 301, 307, along with three stelae bears number 340.¹⁷ All of them have unknown provenance and remain undated. This study aims to provide a probable date and origin for these stelae by analyzing their designs and comparing them with other parallels. Ultimately, this will contribute to shedding light on Christian funerary practices and helps to increase the number of documented Coptic funerary stelae from Upper Egypt.

1. Descriptive Study

1.1. Limestone Funerary Stela (Inv. No. 270)



Pl. 1: Funerary Stela Preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 270) (Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 1.1: A digitally traced funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. no. 270) (Traced by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
1	Limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	270	Width: 22 cm; Height: 42 cm

This Coptic funerary stela is rectangular in form and characterized by a rounded top. Its decorations are divided into three parts. The top part presents a semi-circular floral motif within a border. It includes a triangle in the center with a floral motif inside. The central part depicts a bird likely an eagle flanked by two vertical columns. The lower part shows unscripted rectangular tabula. The stela is poorly preserved. Its edges are chipped and surface shows signs of erosion.

1.2. Limestone Funerary Stela (Inv. No. 307)



Pl. 2: Funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. no. 307) (Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 2.1: A digitally traced funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. no. 307) (Traced by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
2	Limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	307	Width: 25 cm; Height: 20 cm

This Coptic funerary stela presents a semicircular top. It is decorated by curved tendrils, loops, and ovate shapes arranged in a semicircular decorative band. This decorative band is supported by two columns. Two circular motifs carved with a rosette or cross-like floral design is inscribed on both side of the triangle. A triangular form emerges from the center serving as a frame. Beneath this triangle appears the head of an eagle, surmounted by a cross. The upper portions of the eagle's wings are clearly visible on either side. The lower part of this stela is broken and missed.

1.3. Limestone Funerary Stela (Inv. No. 232)



Pl. 3: Funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. no. 232) (Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 3.1: A digitally traced funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. no. 232) (Traced by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
3	Limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	232	Width: 28cm; Height: 48 cm

This stela is rectangular in form and has a rounded arched top. The upper part shows medallion includes a floral cross. Its encircled by interwoven floral form, likely acanthus leaves. Its surface shows signs of natural weathering and erosion. Two horizontal registers of Greek language are inscribed on the middle part. The lower part is plain of any decorations or inscriptions.

Inscription

ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ Ο ΒΩΗ-
ΘΩΝ ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ

Translation

One is God, who helps, Makarios.

1.4. Limestone Funerary Stela (Inv. No. 220)



Pl. 4: Funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 220) (Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 4.1: A digitally traced funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 220) (Traced by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
4	Limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	220	Width: 29 cm; Height: 25 cm

This stela is partly damaged, with its upper part broken and missing. The middle part shows a part of a rose medallion or a circular wreath. A circular border surrounds the medallion. There is an inscription in Greek language below the medallion.

Inscription

ΕΙΣ ΘΕΩ

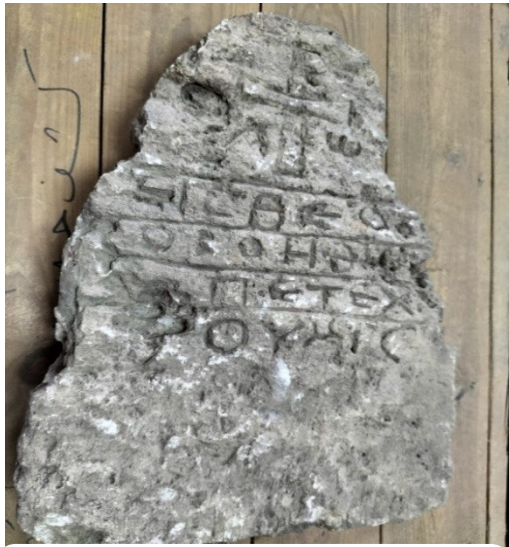
Ο ΒΟΘΩΝ ΜΥΛΗΠΣ Π-

ΚΥΒ[ΕΡΝΗΤΗΣ]

Translation

One is God, who helps, Myleps, the lea[der].

1.5. Limestone Funerary Stela (Inv. No. 301)



Pl. 5: Funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 301)
(Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 5.1: A digitally traced funerary stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 301) (Traced by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
5	Local limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	301	Width: 31 cm; Height: 44 cm

The stela is poorly preserved with irregular breaks along the sides. The upper part inscribed with a cross, flanked by Alpha and Omega Letters on either side. It is followed by four lines of a text in Greek language. The lower part is devoid of any decoration and inscription.

Inscription

Α Ρ Ω

Alpha and Omega

The four lines

ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ

Ο ΒΟΗΘΩΝ

ΠΕΤΕΧΝ-

ΟΥΜΙΣ

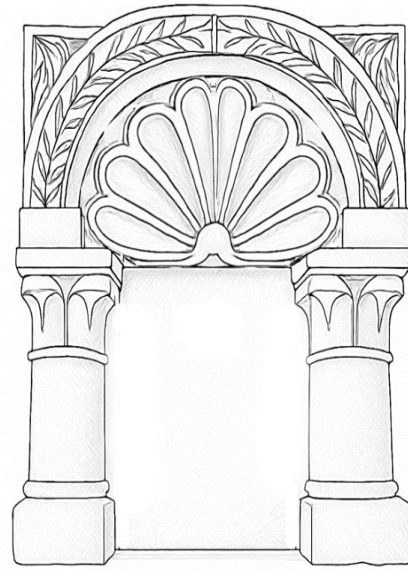
Translation

one is God, who helps, Petekhnoumis.

1.6. Three Limestone Funerary stelae (Inv. No. 340):



Pl. 6: Funerary stela Preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. no. 340)
(Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 6.1: A digitally traced funerary stela Preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse (Inv. no. 340) (Traced by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
6	Local limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	340	Width: 47cm; Height: 61 cm

A collection of three stelae in form of niches are registered with single inventory number 301. They share similarities in material, design, and decorative features. They are all crafted from limestone. The first stela is completed (Pl. 6), while only the upper portions of the remaining two have survived (Pls. 7;8). The first stela features a rounded top, with its upper section displays a deeply carved, fluted niche in the shape of a shell.

Shell flutes are encircled with a floral border featuring a carved plant-scroll motif resemble olive branches. On either side of the niche stands a column topped with a capital supporting the top. The niche is generally well preserved, with visible tool marks and minor surface erosion.



Pl. 7: Funerary stela preserved in Abu Al
Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 340)
(Photographed by the researchers)



Pl. 8: Funerary stela preserved in Abu Al
Jud Storehouse (Inv. No. 340)
(Photographed by the researchers)

Stela No.	Material	Storage location	Inventory Number	Dimensions
7	Local limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	340	Width: 47cm; Height: 28 cm
8	Local limestone	Abu Al-Jud Storehouse	340	Width: 47cm; Height: 28 cm

The other two funerary stelae preserve only the upper parts of their niches. Both of them are adorned with a frieze of floral motifs surrounding a shell-shaped niche. No inscriptions are found.

2. Analytical Study

These stelae are decorated with architectural elements such as pointed arches and shell shaped niches. They also display Geometrical symbolic motifs like crosses. Plants are shown like vine, olive, and wreathes of plants. Birds like eagles are also depicted. Moreover, Greek inscriptions are often present.

2.1. Architectural elements

2.1.1 Arches

Pointed arches supported by two columns are shown on the studied stelae (Pls. 1.1; 2.1). Their form resembles portal of a church and has several symbolic meanings. They take a triangular form which refers to the Holy Trinity. It also symbolizes the entrance to the heavenly Jerusalem. Moreover, it symbolizes the soul departure from life into the heavenly paradise.¹⁸

2.1.2 Shell Niche

The shell was associated with certain sea deities emerging from the water like Aphrodite in Greek Mythology. Later, the shell was used as a symbol of rebirth and renewal life for the Copts. In Coptic iconography shell niche symbolizes immortality, resurrection and rebirth. Its primary symbolism, according to the depicted context, is resurrection (Pls. 6.1; 7, 8).¹⁹ A shell niche flanked by two columns evokes the entrance to paradise (Pls. 6, 6.1).

2.2. Geometrical decorations

2.2.1. The Medallion

The circular design symbolizes eternal life and unending existence. The radiating design inside the circle refers to the sun or the cross, with the sun refers to Jesus Christ. It also looks like a wheel in reference to the divine power (Pls. 3.1; 4.1).²⁰

2.2.2. Braid Ornament

The braid ornament is a decorative motif composed of interwoven lines resembling plait. In Coptic art the braid motif was popular due to its relation to monastic life. Many monks wove palm fronds into baskets and other goods. This motif was widespread in Coptic manuscripts from the six century AD. It was called "*dakak*". It was used to decorate manuscript borders, letters, benches, and crosses. The braid usually symbolizes eternal and infinite life. A circular frame of braid contained a Christogram indicating that belief in Christ's death and resurrection leads to eternal life. (Pl. 3.1).²¹

2.3. Birds

2.3.1. Eagle Decoration

In Coptic funerary art the eagle holds a variety of symbolic meanings. It refers to Jesus Christ and His resurrection. In the Old Testament, the eagle is linked to divine guardianship. The eagle's ability to fly to great heights and approach the sun inspired its role as a symbolic messenger between the earthly and the divine. Additionally, the Copts incorporated the eagle into their funerary stelae as a guardian figure to defend the deceased from devils (Pls. 1.1; 2.1).²²

2.4. Floral Motifs:

2.4.1 Intertwining vines

Frames of stelae are decorated with floral motifs look like tendrils with simple twigs show a geometrical design with interlacing's and zigzags. The intertwining vines appears in stelae from Esna. Generally, vineyard is used to refer to righteous within Lord' vineyard (Pls. 1.1; 2.1).²³

2.4.2. Olive branches

Olive branches are inscribed on the graves of martyrs. They are usually held by angels announcing the birth of Christ. The olive has long symbolized peace and prosperity.²⁴ The Olive leaf also represents peace, new life, and hope since the early history of mankind, as mentioned in the biblical story of the flood (Pls. 6.1; 7; 8).²⁵

2.4.3. Wreath Motif

Wreath motif is frequently depicted in funerary context, particularly on funerary stelae. It symbolizes Christ's resurrection and eternal life. It also conveys the victory of life over death (Pls. 3.1; 4.1).²⁶

2.5. Inscriptions

Stelae with inventory numbers 232, 220, 301 bear inscriptions in Greek language. It starts with the expression $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma\ \omicron\ \beta\omega\eta\text{-}\theta\omega\eta$ "*One is God, Who Helps*". This formula was frequently used in funerary stelae of Upper Egypt, particularly Esna, Armant, Luxor, and Edfu.²⁷

3. Comparative Study

3.1. Funerary Stelae with Inv. No. 270 and 307

Funerary stelae with Inv. No. 270 and 307 (Pls. 1, 2) can be compared with parallel examples that shared common material, design and symbolic motifs. Such comparison helps to trace their origin and to give them a probable date. From the many similar stelae only three examples are chosen for comparison.

Comparative Aspect	Compared stelae	Comparative Examples		
		Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Current Location	Abu Al Jud Storehouse	Metropolitan Museum of Art	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston	Coptic Museum?
Inv. No.	270 /307	08.202.10	04.1845	8662
Provenance	Unknown	Luxor	Esna	Esna
Date	Unknown	6 th : 7 th CE.	6 th : 7 th CE.	6 th : 7 th CE.
Material	Limestone	Limestone	Limestone	Limestone
Design	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top
Iconographic Theme	Eagle within a portal	Eagle within a portal	Eagle within a portal	Eagle within a portal

The first example is a funerary stela housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is now displayed in gallery 302 at Fifth Avenue. This stela dates to the 6th and 7th centuries AD. It originates from Luxor, Upper Egypt. This stela shares similarities with the targeted stelae Inv. Nos. 270 and 307; particularly the semicircular top, the central motif depicts an eagle with outstretched wings, framed within architectural frame. In addition to geometric and floral motifs that decorate the surface.²⁸

The second example is a limestone funerary stela displayed in Gallery 208 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It dates to the 6th and 7th centuries AD. It is origin from Esna in Upper Egypt. This stela shares common features with stelae numbers 1 and 2. The central motif features an eagle with outstretched wings. This eagle is set within a roofed pointed architectural frame. The rounded top encloses a floral motif.²⁹

The third example is documented in "*Catalogue Général*".³⁰ It is made of limestone and originally from Esna. It reveals notable iconographic similarities with targeted compared stelae (Pls. 1, 2). It has a semicircular arch. Its master scene is eagle within a portal. This portal topped by pointed arch supported by two columns in both sides. in addition to floral frieze surrounds the top.

The analysis of these three examples and by comparing them with funerary stelae of Abu Al Jud Store house (Inv. Nos. 207; 307) (Pls. 1, 2) shows clear similarities in material, style and main iconographic motifs. So, they can be dated to the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Their suggested provenance is Esna in Upper Egypt.



PL.9: Funerary stela exhibited in MET Museum.



Pl. 10: Funerary stela exhibited in MFA, Boston.



Pl.11: Funerary stela no. 8662. After; Crum, *Catalogue Général*, 137.

3.2. Funerary stela with Inv. No. 232

There are two examples that share similarities with funerary stela (Inv. No. 232).

Comparative Aspect	Compared stelae	Comparative Examples	
		Example 1	Example 2
Current Location	Abu Al Jud Storehouse	British Museum	Coptic Museum?
Inv. NO.	232	EA714	8662
Provenance	Unknown	Esna	Esna
Date	Unknown	6 th : 7 th CE.	6 th : 8 th CE.
Material	Limestone	Limestone	Limestone
Design	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top
Iconographic Theme	Medallion includes a floral cross	A wreath includes a cross	A wreath includes a cross

The first example is displayed in the British Museum. It dates between the sixth and seventh centuries AD. It comes from Esna in Upper Egypt and is carved from limestone. Both stelae have similar designs, featuring semicircular tops and a decoration style that includes a cross within a wreath at the center of the limestone stele. A Greek inscription beneath the wreaths is another similar feature.³¹

The second one is mentioned in "*Catalogue Général*".³² It dated to the late 6th to early 8th centuries AD. It is crafted of limestone with a semicircular top. At the center appears a cross, surrounded by small circular motifs and enclosed within a braided border. A Coptic inscription encircles the central design and continues along the lower section of the stela.



Pl. 12: funerary stela exhibited in British Museum, EA714.



Pl. 13: Funerary stela no. 8662. After; Crum, *Catalogue Général*, PL. XIX.

3.3. Funerary stela with Inv. No. 220

Two funerary stelae are documented in "*Catalogue Général*" compared with a stela preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse with Inv. No. 220.

Comparative Aspect	Compared stelae	Comparative Examples	
		Example 1	Example 2
Current Location	Abu Al Jud Storehouse	Coptic Museum?	Coptic Museum?
Inv. NO.	220	8508	8544.
Provenance	Unknown	Esna	Esna
Date	Unknown	5 th : 6 th CE.	5 th : 6 th CE.
Material	Limestone	Limestone	Limestone

Design	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top	Rectangular with semi Circular top
Iconographic Theme	A wreath includes a cross	A wreath includes a cross	A wreath includes a cross

The first funerary stela is carved from limestone with irregular rectangular shape and semicircular top. It is probably dating to the 5th or 6th century AD. A prominent circular medallion includes a cross bordered by a vine scroll. Beneath the circular design is a short inscription in Greek script.³³

The second funerary stela is made from limestone, with a rounded top. At the top center of the stone is a large Christogram symbolize Jesus Christ. The Christogram is encircled within a decorative circular border. Beneath the symbol is a short inscription in Greek and Coptic Languages.³⁴



Pl. 14: Funerary stela no. 8508. After; Crum, *Catalogue Général*, PL. XIX.



Pl. 15: Funerary stela no. 8544. After; Crum, *Catalogue Général*, PL. XXV.

3.4. Three funerary stelae (Collection Inv. No. 340)

Two examples share notable similarities in material, design, and decorative motifs with the three limestone funerary stelae (Collection Inv. No. 340) preserved in Abu Al Jud storehouse.

Comparative Aspect	Compared stelae	Comparative Examples	
		Example 1	Example 2
Current Location	Abu Al Jud Storehouse	British Museum	Coptic Museum?
Inv. NO.	340	EA937	8674
Provenance	Unknown	Upper Egypt	Luxor
Date	Unknown	5 th ; 8 th CE.	5 th ; 6 th CE.
Material	Limestone	Limestone	Limestone
Design	Niche Shaped Stela	Niche Shaped Stela	Niche Shaped Stela
Iconographic Theme	Shell niche and cross	Shell niche and cross	Shell niche

The first example is housed in the British Museum. It is dated broadly to the 5th and 8th centuries AD. It is suggested to be originated in Upper Egypt. This painted limestone funerary stela is carved in the shape of a niche, with two columns supporting an arched top crowned by a shell-shaped conch. A two-line Coptic inscription. Beneath the inscription is a square projection featuring an encircled cross.³⁵

The second example is recorded in the *"General Catalogue"*.³⁶ This stela is carved from limestone and features a niche, the upper part of which takes the form of a shell-shaped conch, flanked and supported by two columns. The stela originates from Luxor.



Pl. 16: Funerary Stela displayed in British Museum topped by a niche.



Pl. 17: Funerary Stela topped with a niche. After; Crum, *Catalogue Général*, PL. XLVII

Conclusion

- The study of Coptic funerary stelae preserved in Abu Al Jud Storehouse reveals their significance in reflecting the theological and artistic identity of early Christian communities in Upper Egypt.
- Whole the eight studied stelae preserved in Abu Al Jud Museum store are all made of local limestone and engraved in sunk relief.
- Whole stelae have decorative motifs with Christian symbolism like architectural elements, floral motifs, geometrical designs and birds like eagle. Moreover, they have inscription in Greek language (Inv. Nos. 232, 220, 301).
- The comparative study revealed that whole the eight studied stelae discussed in this research are suggested to have originated from Upper Egypt in general, and from Esna in particular, as indicated by their stylistic and artistic features.
- The comparative study concluded that all eight studied stelae discussed in this research are suggested to ranges in date between fifth to seventh centuries AD., as follows:
 - Funerary stelae Inv. Nos. 270 and 307 are suggested to date back to the sixth to seventh centuries AD.
 - Funerary stelae Inv. No. 232 proper dates to the sixth to seventh centuries AD.
 - Funerary stelae Inv. No. 220 ranges from the fifth to sixth centuries AD.
 - Collection Inv. No. 340 ranges in date from fifth to seventh centuries AD.

Endnotes:

¹ George A. Reisner, "The Position of Early Grave Stelae," in *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith* (London: Egypt Exploration Society; Oxford University Press, 1932), 324.

² John Baines and Jaromír Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1980), 62–63.

³ Aly Omar Aly Abdalla, *Graeco-Roman Funerary Stelae from Upper Egypt* (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 1983), 443–445.

⁴ Johnny Pelsmaekers, "Stela," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya, vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 2149–2153.

- ⁵ Geoffrey T. Martin with S. J. Clackson et al., *Stelae from Egypt and Nubia in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, c.3000 BC–AD 1150*, Coptic catalogue (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 167–82.
- ⁶ Mario Cappozzo, *Aspetti dell'ideologia funeraria nell'Egitto cristiano: le stele copte* (PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017), 28.
- ⁷ Pelsmaekers, "Stela," 2150.
- ⁸ Alexander Badawy, *Coptic Art and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 210.
- ⁹ Cappozzo, *Aspetti dell'ideologia funeraria*, 29–30.
- ¹⁰ Pelsmaekers, "Stela," 2149–2153.
- ¹¹ The ancient city of Armant is situated on the west bank of the Nile, about 15 km. to the south of Thebes. It was known in Egyptian texts as "Iuny, Iunu, Iunu-shema" or "Iunu-Montu". It was known as "Hermonthis" by Greeks and its Coptic name was "Ermont". See: Émile Amélineau, *La Géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque copte* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1893), 165–67.
- ¹² Esna City is located about 55 km. south Luxor City. It is bordered by Armant City to the north and Edfu City to the south. Its Greek name was Latopolis and Coptic "Sne". It possesses along Christian heritage. The *Synaxarion* records several martyrs from Latopolis, including Ammonius, commemorated on 14 Kiyahk and 19 Tubah. See:
- Randall Stewart, "Isna," *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1312a–1312b. also; حسن محمد نور، مدينة إسنا وأثارها في العصور الإسلامية، دار الكتب المصرية، القاهرة، 1994م، 1.
- ¹³ Thebes City is known today as Luxor, was one of the greatest and most influential cities of ancient Egypt. It flourished particularly during the New Kingdom when it became the capital of the country and the religious center of god Amun. Luxor became a bishopric in the eleventh century. Yet Christian presence is evident earlier. In the fourth century, Copts used the Temple of Karnak, turning some of its sanctuaries into churches. They painted Christian murals. Most of these traces were later lost due to climatic changes from the Aswan Dam. See: Randall Stewart, "Luxor," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1484b.
- ¹⁴ Badawy, *Coptic Art and Architecture*, 214.
- ¹⁵ Cappozzo, *Aspetti dell'ideologia funeraria*, 260–274.
- ¹⁶ Badawy, *Coptic Art and Architecture*, 215.
- ¹⁷ Permission for the publication and study of these stelae was granted by the Permanent Committee for Islamic and Coptic Antiquities on August 12, 2024.
- ¹⁸ George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 153, 174.
- ¹⁹ Marianne Nabil Guirguis, Khaled M. Dewidar, Shaimaa M. Kamel, and Maged F. Iscandar, "Categorization of Symbolism in Religious Architecture: A Case Study of the Coptic Orthodox Church Architecture," *Alexandria Engineering Journal* 59, no. 1 (2020): 533–545, 7.
- ²⁰ Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, 45, 153.
- ²¹ نرمين رزق لله داود رزق لله، نشوة سعيد سليمان، ونادر ألفي ذكري، "الزخارف الهندسية في المخطوطات القبطية في ضوء مجموعة من مخطوطات الأبصلمودية والبصخة في العصر العثماني"، مجلة كلية السياحة والفنادق – جامعة مدينة السادات، المجلد 6، العدد 1/1 (يونيو 2022): 180.
- ²² Elisabetta Lucchesi-Palli, "Eagle," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya, vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), PP. 2169–2171.
- ²³ Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, 32–33.
- ²⁴ Clara Erskine Clement, *A Handbook of Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints* (Boston: Ticknor And Company, 1886), 5, 20.
- ²⁵ Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 56–57.
- ²⁶ Dragana Rogic et al., "Wreath: its Use and Meaning in Ancient Visual Culture," *Religion and Tolerance, Journal of the center for Empirical Researches on Religion* 10, no. 18, (December 2012), 341–342.
- ²⁷ Ahmed T. A. Khalil. *Three Sahidic Coptic Funerary Stelae from Upper Egypt. Journal of Archaeological Research and Studies* 3 (September 2018), 3.
- ²⁸ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453856>. Accessed on August 21, 2025, at 4:50 p.m.
- ²⁹ <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/130929/christian-funerary-stele-with-paradisiacal-motifs>. Accessed on August 22, 2025, at 10:00 p.m.
- ³⁰ W. E. Crum, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire: Coptic Monuments. Nos. 8001–8741*, reprint of the 1902 edition (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlag, 1975), 137.
- ³¹ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA714. Accessed on August 22, 2025, at 11:00 p.m.
- ³² Crum, *Catalogue général*, 112.
- ³³ Crum, *Catalogue général*, 112.
- ³⁴ Crum, *Catalogue général*, 117.
- ³⁵ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA937. Accessed on August 23, 2025, at 10:00 p.m.
- ³⁶ Crum, *Catalogue général*, 139.