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The Story of Egypt's Multilingual Amir Akhor Stone, 1800-1830s

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Keywords

Amir Akhor, Burton Tablet, Caristie, Rosetta Stone, Decipherment.

Abstract

The discovery of trilingual stones was crucial for the modern decipherment of hieroglyphs and other ancient Egyptian scripts. Although the Rosetta Stone is the most famous example, several other inscribed stones (stela, plural: stelae) also played a role in this scholarly venture. Vicissitudes of their discovery, the antiquities market, and scholarly rivalries meant, however, that they were not as readily available for study. Concentrating on the trilingual stela variously known as the Caristie Stone, Burton Tablet, and the Amir Akhor Stone, this article examines the history of its discovery, later reports on it, and its eventual acquisition by Europeans. In contrast to the Rosetta Stone, which the British seized for the British Museum after defeating the France's Egyptian Expedition in 1801, the Amir Akhor Stone ended up in the Louvre Museum. As the 19th century progressed, however, increased modern Egyptian appreciation of their pharaonic heritage meant that the Tanis Stone, discovered in 1866, was kept in Egypt.

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1. Introduction

The famous Rosetta Stone was not the only trilingual stela to attract the attention of the French savants who accompanied Bonaparte's Expedition to Egypt (1798-1801). Another was the stela variously called the Caristie Stone (after its French discoverer), the Burton Tablet, and the Amir Akhor Stone (Fig. 1). One of the Expedition's leading savants, Edmé-François Jomard, recognized its great potential: "*Un monument plus précieux que la Pierre de Rosette même*"¹. The great decipherer himself, Jean François Champollion, later wrote: "*The possession of such a monument would be a treasure for science*"² (29th Sep. 1828).

The story of the discovery of the Amir Akhor Stone comes in two chapters. The first chapter begins in September 1800 when it was discovered by the French engineer Caristie,³ for whom the stone was first named. The second chapter began after nearly 20 years of silence when a fierce contest took place between the French and the British to acquire the stone. Eventually, the French obtained the actual Amir Akhor Stone in the 1820s while the British had difficulty getting accurate copies and a cast of it.

Champollion's progress in deciphering hieroglyphs beginning in 1822 highlighted the value of trilingual texts in particular and of Egyptian antiquities in general. The Rosetta and Amir Akhor Stones had been exported without Egyptian resistance. Egyptians studying and living in Paris in the later 1820s were aware of his discoveries, and Rifa'a al-Tahtawi in particular helped awaken his countrymen to the value of their ancient Egyptian heritage. In 1835, Egypt's increasingly autonomous Ottoman governor, Mohamed Ali Pasha, issued the first decrees to regulate the export of antiquities, and establish a rudimentary antiquities Service and museum in Cairo. The Egyptian Antiquities Service and its Museum of Egyptian Antiquities—under French direction—were established on firmer grounds in 1858. When the trilingual Canopus Stone⁴ was excavated at Tanis in 1866, there was no question of allowing it to be exported to Europe; casts were made instead.

The current study aims to:

1. Tackling the story of the Amir Akhor Stone and the mosque where the stone was found.
2. Clarifying the French Campaign description for the first Amir Akhor Stone in *Description de l'Égypte*.
3. Describing the second appearance of the stone and how Burton prepared a cast for the second Amir Akhor Stone which went to France.
4. Tracking the required procedures under the reign of Mohamed Ali, for the appropriation of certain antiquities and the consuls' contesting for owning such antiquities.

A descriptive analytical methodology was employed to achieve the aims of the study.

¹ Jomard, 1818, p. 10.

² Drovetti, 1985, p. 569.

³ Philippe Joseph or Jean-Marie Caristie, born in Avallon (1775 – 1852) was a French engineer of bridges and roads. He was a student of the first class of the École polytechnique in 1794, and as such was part of the Egyptian campaign. Back in France, he was chief engineer of the Ponts et Chaussées for the department of Vaucluse from 1804 to 1817 (Fourcy, 1828, p. 392). For more about Philippe Joseph or Jean-Marie Caristie: Hachette, 1813, p. 459; Brial, 2006, p. 10 and 79; Durey, 2001, pp. 17-42.

⁴ Tanis Stone or stela was discovered, by Lipsius, in the ruins of Tanis. Tanis stela's inscription is written in hieroglyphs, Greek and demotic, it was removed to Boulaq museum in 1867 (Simpson, 1996, pp.15-16)



Fig.1, Stone no. C 122 now in the Louvre Museum
(© 2003 Musée du Louvre / Christian Décamps
<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010027713>

2. Amir Akhor Mosque

2.1 The mosque constructor

Amir Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah Amir Akhor⁵ was a Mamluk for Sultan Al-Ashraf Qait Bay (1467-1495/872-900 H) who freed him and paved the way for his promotion. In (898H/1493AD) he became Amir Ashara (prince of ten). Many promotions followed in greater Syria, where El-Rammah became Amir Halab (Prince of Aleppo). After that El-Rammah returned to Egypt and married Saad El-Melouk daughter of Yashbuk Al-Mahdy. Qany Bay was promoted to be Mokaddem Alf (prince of 1000) under the reign of Al-Naser Mohamed ebn Qait Bay (901-902/1495-1496) then became Amir Akhor in 1497, a title which he kept for nearly 18 years .

According to Ebn Iyas he was a: “tall, brawny, heavy, and wealthy man. He was so famous for courage, perfect horse riding, so professional in using spear that he was titled as Al-Rammah, he died in 1515, and Sultan Al-Ghoury himself attended his funeral.”

2.2 The Amir Akhor Mosques and Madrasas

Qani Bay Qurra El-Rammah built a mosque in Cairo’s Al-Qalaa (the Citadel) Square (Pl. I) that still can be seen. He also built another mosque and madrasa (Pl. I, 2, 3)⁶ (911H/1505 AD/no. 254) beside *en-Nasrieh* Lake⁷ where the Amir Akhor Stone was utilized as a threshold.⁸(Pl. II 1, 2)

⁵ Akhor is a Persian word referring to someone responsible for horses and other animals in the Sultan’s stable. It was originated by al-Zaher Babers (1223 – 1277AD) who was the first to define the mission of the Amir Akhor’s job, which was critical in war and peace. The Amir Akhor had to be ready any movement, travel, or parade by the sultan. (Waqquad, 2019, pp.218-220)

⁶ For the full description of the mosque : Rezq, 3.2, 2003, pp. 1844-1861

⁷ According to Ebn Iyas “Ameer Qani Bay established his Mosque and Madrasa near from *en-Nasrieh* Lake which was formed as result of digging (by orders of Naser Mohamed Ebn Qalawoon) to establish a horse corral. The

3. The Amir Akhor Stone (Caristie Stone) of 1800:

The French engineer Caristie was the first to notice and document the stone in the Amir Akhor Mosque in Sept. 1800. The stone was in bad condition and illegible.⁹ In 1800, the Caristie Stone, was, according to *Description de l'Égypte*, a windowsill of the Amir Akhor Mosque¹⁰ of *en-Nasrieh*.¹¹ It was described as :

“..... un objet plus important : c'étoit une inscription trilingue ; malheureusement elle est réduite à la moitié dans le sens de sa longueur, et presque entièrement effacée par suite de la place qu'elle occupoit : elle servait en effet de pierre d'appui a une fenêtre extérieure de la mosquée d'Emyr-Khour ou de Nasryeh (voyez planche 26, E. M. vol, 1 carreau S-13) (fig.2) où elle a essuyé un frottement continuel pendant un temps dont on ignore la durée. La pierre est d'un granit noir à grain très-fin, J'ai noté dans mon journal que la matière étoit un basalte noir, et aussi que la longueur étoit de 1m,7 seulement (5^{ds}) ; mais la longueur, de 0^m,67(2^{ds}) longue de 2 mètres(6^{ds}) sur 0^m,40 (15^{po}) de large, arrondie au sommet comme certaines stèles ; l'épaisseur est de 0^m,3 (11 pouces) : une aile déployée occupe la partie supérieure.”¹²

Caristie's discovery was also documented by the French Journal “*Le Courier*” (Fig.2).



Fig 2 (a-b), *Courier de l'Égypte* reports the discovery of the first Amir Akhor Stone by Caristie in issue no. 108, (21st March 1801)
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026593304&view=1up&eq=1&skin=2021>

lake was about 7 feddans, filled with water since 1321-1322 and soon was surrounded by houses. (Maher, 4, 1971,p.321)

⁸ For further references on the Mosque of *Amir Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah Amir Akhor (en-Nasrieh)* (Rezq, 3.2, 2003, pp.1860-1861)

⁹ The Amir Akhor Stone was next mentioned in the *Description de l'Égypte, in Etat Modern, 2Part II* (1813), p. 99, with n. 2; and in *Antiquites Memoires*, 2 (1818): 144; the corresponding passages in the second edition are respectively, text vol. 15 (1826): 186 with n. 1 and text vol. 9 (1829): 571-2.

¹⁰ I am so grateful to Mr. Emad Othman (ex-director of Islamic Monuments east Cairo depart.) who helped to define and find the present location of Amir Akhor mosque in *en-Nasrieh*.

¹¹ *en-Nasrieh* quarter (southeast of Fatimid Cairo and near al-Sayyida Zenab) is bordered by Al-Mobtadyan St. on the south, *en-Nasrieh* St. on the east, Al-Esmaely mosque on the north, and Nubar St. on the west. (Maher, 1971, p. 321)

¹² *Description de l'Égypte*, 1818, p. 10.

4. The Amir Akhor Stone After the departure of the French Expedition

After the departure of the French Campaign in 1801, the first Amir Akhor Stone was left in the court of the *Institut d'Égypte* where the French expedition and scientists had lived and worked.¹³ (Pl. III 1,2)

It was part of a large collection originally assembled by the French savants which was not confiscated by the British and remained in the *Institut d'Égypte*. Colonel Holloway, Major Hope, and other British artillery officers later lived in the *Institut d'Égypte*, where many of the antiquities remained for years afterward.¹⁴ After the French Expedition had left Egypt, Edward Clarke¹⁵ reported seeing the Caristie Stone, which he described as “similar to the famous trilingual stone now in the British Museum.” He reported that Colonel Holloway intended to move the stone but never did.

He also described the inscriptions as being much effaced and that “*The Greek characters are so little legible, that the author could not succeed in copying them.....*” Clarke hoped to acquire the Caristie Stone but was unsuccessful.¹⁶

According to the letters from Thomas Young¹⁷ to Jomard¹⁸ concerning the first Amir Akhor stone which was still in the *Institut d'Égypte*; Clarke called Young’s attention to the Stone.¹⁹

Jomard wrote to Young in (Paris, 17th Aug 1815)²⁰ emphasizing that the stone was still in the court of the Institute and that he read about it in a journal, probably *Le Courier de L'Égypte*, no. 108, referred to previously. In the letter, Jomard expressed his hope that the British consul-general in Egypt Henry Salt might collect this first Amir Akhor Stone.²¹ Though he remained in Egypt, Bernardino Drovetti, was no longer the French consul-general there and had run into difficulties with Boghos Yusufian, an influential advisor to Mohamed Ali.²² Jomard and Young had already established scholarly cooperation across the English Channel; Jomard sent his hieroglyphic inscription table to Young and a copy of the *Description de l'Égypte*. Salt did not acquire the Caristie Stone,²³ however, and Young turned instead to his

¹³ The French Institute or *Institut d'Égypte* was in *en-Nasrieh*, south-west end of Cairo, where it occupied many constructions, in the house of Hasan Kachef (Bret, 1998, p. 131).

¹⁴ Bret, 1998, p. 214.

¹⁵ Edward Daniel Clarke (1769-1822): An English mineralogist and traveler who amassed valuable collections of minerals, manuscripts, and Greek coins and sculpture. Clarke journeyed through England (1791), Italy (1792 and 1794), Scandinavia, Finland, Russia, Siberia, Asia Minor, and Greece (1799–1802). After his return to England, Clarke became a minister in the Church of England (1805) and the first professor of mineralogy at the University of Cambridge (1808). His principal work was *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa*, 6 vol. (1810–23). (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Daniel-Clarke>)

¹⁶ Clarke, 1817, p. 70-73

¹⁷ Thomas Young (1773-1829): An English physician and physicist who established the principle of interference of light and thus resurrected the century-old wave theory of light. He was also an Egyptologist who helped decipher the Rosetta Stone. For more information: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Young>.

¹⁸ Jomard, Edmé François (1777-1862) French engineer, geographer, and antiquarian. A member of the Napoleon’s Commission in Egypt. He returned to Paris in 1803 and took a large part in the editing of the *Description de l'Égypte* to which he made many contributions. He was elected to the *Académie des Inscriptions* in 1818, and appointed conservator of the Bibliothèque Nationale, in 1828; he produced 6 vols. of commentaries on the text of *Description de l'Égypte*. He was known as “le Dernier Egyptien”: Bierbrier, 2019, p. 40.

¹⁹ Auriant, 1978, p. 29.

²⁰ The letter from Jomard to Young Paris 17th 0 of Aug., 1815 “*Il en est de même d'un morceau semblable, découvert par M. Caristie dans une mosquée du quartier d'Asym Bey (Probably there is a mistake in the Asym Bey and it is Kasem Bey) pour déchiffrer les hiéroglyphes.....*”. (Young, 1855, p. 442)

²¹ Young, 1855, pp. 69-70.

²² Drovetti was the French consul in Egypt two times with interval of about 5 years which he spent also in Egypt as collector of antiquities: Koenig, 1982, pp. 237-253.

²³ Young, 1855, pp. 69-70.

friend James Burton,²⁴ whose son by coincidence was arranging his visit to Egypt. Young's letter to Burton may have been the last correspondence to refer to the first Amir Akhor Stone or the Caristie Stone:

"It has occurred to me to suggest to you a very important inquiry, which seems to have escaped the attention of the modern travellers in Egypt: it is to hunt out a stone which as observed by the French, and by Mr. Caristie in particular. It was "a great portion(?) of black basalt, very well polished, and serving as the support of the window of a mosque in the quarter of the Institute. It is 9 feet long and 2 wide; the upper end is rounded off. It contains three inscriptions, like the stone of Rosetta, the lower in Greek, containing about 74 lines: the middle one like that of Rosetta, and containing about 27 lines, but much injured, and even the Greek is scarcely legible".

Now if the stone was in a mosque it is probably in the mosque still: and it would be extremely important to obtain a cast of it in plaster or in wax, even with all its imperfections. It would be still easier to take a "calque" of it, which might be sufficient if done with care and repeated in duplicate or triplicate. You know the way to stick a piece of thinnish paper on the surface at the corners, and to rub it carefully over with black lead: nutmeg will sometimes do as well or better, and may be more easily procured: but I send you a piece of excellent black lead, which I hope you will receive with this letter, by the hands of your Maltese [i.e. his servant??].

I saw a stone of this kind in Drovetti's collection at Leghorn on my return from Naples, and I made an urgent application to him to allow me to have a cast of it. I have not yet received his answer, but I sincerely hope it will put me in possession of matters which may tend materially to illustrate the literature of Egypt.

With every good wish for your success and prosperity. Believe me, Dear Sir, your faithful and obedient servant,

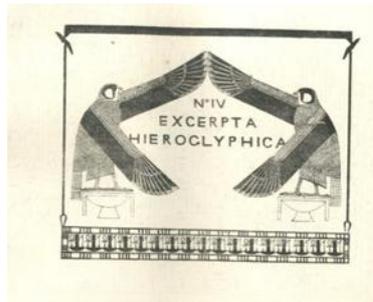
*Thomas Young (28 November 1821)."*²⁵

5. Turning from the First Amir Akhor (the Caristie) stone to the Second Amir Akhor stone (Burton tablet)

Thomas Young informed Burton about the existence of the stone in the court of the *Institut d'Egypte* then Young moved to the second Amir Akhor stone namely the threshold of *Amir Akhor* mosque. Young did not declare the relationship between the two pieces (the Caristie Stone or the first Amir Akhor stone that was in the *Institut d'Egypte* and the second Amir Akhor stone in the mosque) and requested a cast of the second Amir Akhor stone from Burton. Burton copied part of the second Amir Akhor stone's text (fig.3).

²⁴ British Egyptologist and traveler (1788-1862), assisted by Lord Prudhoe and others, he published *Excerpta Hieroglyphica* (fig.3), 64 plates without letter-press, 1825-8 included the Amir Akhor Stone text. (Bierbrier, 2019, p.81) Burton also made a large collection of Egyptian antiquities which sold at Sotheby's, 25-7 July 1836, a catalogue being issued describing the 420 lots; many lots were bought by the British Museum. (Catalogue of the very interesting collection, 1836, p. 34.)

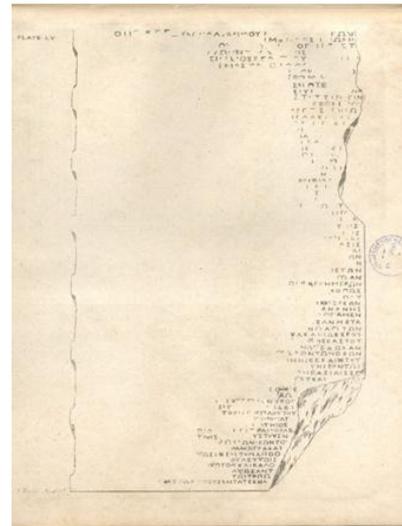
²⁵ Young; London, 28 Nov.182, f. 13. Leake to G. B. British Library.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 3 (a) Burton James, *Excerpta Hieroglyphica*, Cairo, 1825-1829
(b-c), Second Amir Akhor Stone as copied by Burton in *Excerpta Hieroglyphica*.

Burton's name continued in the story for a while, nearly from 1821 to 1829. He made an official request to the *Diwan Khedive*,²⁶ as documented in the Egyptian governmental archives.²⁷ Burton's request was directed to Mohamed Ali through the *Diwan Khedive*: was directed to Mohamed Ali through the *Diwan Khedive*:
 "The foreigners want to remove the lower threshold of the door of the *Mirakhor* (Amir Akhor) Mosque, which has an old inscription on it, and take it with them because it is one of the antiquities:

- *The 733 Turkish notebook (Daftar Turkey).*
- *Page 52 series 250.*
- *From Mamur Al-Diwan Al-Khedewy (head of Diwan Khedive "Habib Effendi") to the Al-Ganab Al-Aaly (Mohamed Ali)*
- *no. 124, on 24 Shawwal 1242 AH / 1827 AD.*

Habib said that the British told him several times through their Dragoman that they wanted to remove the lower threshold (stone) of the door of the "*Mirakhor*" Mosque (Amir Akhor), which is located inside "*Bab al-Nasriya*", near "*Bab Al-Mastaba*" (the

²⁶ In 1819 Mohamed Ali established Diwan Khedive to deal with some of Egypt's internal affairs. Later the Diwan dealt with all Egypt's internal affairs, and Mohamed Ali's decisions on them. The Diwan Khedive gradually grew to include departments of commerce, education, and finance. In 1837, the Diwan Khedive was more specifically organized to deal with the administration of 1. the city of Cairo and the provinces 2. giving Mohamed Ali's orders concerning salaries. 3. Construction 4. Bakeries 5. The Bulak arsenal. Said Pasha renamed the *Diwan Khedive* the *Diwan Misr* Governorate. (Al-Swefy, 1988, p. 20.)

²⁷ Ali, 2016, p. 133; Al-Damasy, 2004, pp. 448-449.

door of *Al-Mastaba*) in “*al-Mahrousa*” (Cairo), which is a black stone with old inscriptions on both sides. They want to take it with them because it is one of the antiquities. They ask permission in this regard (for taking this stone) because the mosque is old (nearly ruined)”

The reply of Mohamed Ali did not take more than 2 days: he did not agree to remove the stone from the mosque.²⁸ Mohamed Ali was very careful concerning antiquities to balance France and Britain, but in this case, as the stone was a part of the mosque, Mohamed Ali decided that taking the stone from the mosque would create problems. Burton tried in his letters to explain how badly the mosque of Amir Akhor was ruined, especially the part where the stone was, and how people misused the stone either to sharpen their knives or take rest on it.²⁹

Despite the negative reply of Mohamed Ali, Burton kept trying to get the stone, as can be seen in a letter from Dr. Young to Sir W. Gell.³⁰

Burton moved to request funds. An official request was made by Burton to the British authorities to purchase the stone because “*it is an important piece that he would like to add to the Rosetta Stone.*”³¹ On the other side, Champollion encouraged and pushed the French request as can be seen in his letter to Jérôme Isaac Méchain (1778-1851), then French Consul in Larnaka, formerly an astronomer with the French forces in Egypt 1798-1801 (Fig.4 a-c):

Cairo, 29th Sep. 1828

Lord Prudhoe,³² whom I found here³³, took me to see the famous bilingual stone.....this stone, which serves as a threshold to a small mosque in Cairo, is really a triple inscription in hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek characters; only a very small part of it can be seen along its length. If, as is possible, the rest of this stone is hidden in the interior steps or embedded in the uprights of the parts, which it would be easy to ascertain, it would be worthwhile for M. Drovetti to take steps to have H.H. give him this invaluable monument as a gift to rebuild the small door of this mosque. I insist on this idea because the possession of such a monument would be a treasure for science. It has been refused, to be given to the English consul...but it has not yet been refused, to the French consul general, that is very good; it would be a beautiful and good victory over British pride, and an excellent opportunity to console France for the loss of the Rosetta monument. I must say that the visible part of the inscription is almost erased and illegible; this may be due to rubbing and it is to be believed that what is involved in the construction is much better preserved. I recommend this matter to all the attention of M' Drovetti; it would be beautiful for him to return to Europe with such a trophy.³⁴

²⁸ Abou-Ghazi, 1988, p.1; Ali, 2016, p. 133.

²⁹ Barker, Correspondence with J. Burton: 1828-1830, British Library.

³⁰ Young, 1855, pp. 442-443 (letter to Sir W. Gell on Oct 1827), British Library.

³¹ HO 44/17/76, Public Record(s), 1827 Oct 6, The National Archives, Kew Garden.

³² Lord Prudhoe (1792-1865): A British collector; from 1826 he travelled in the East and met Champollion in Cairo in Sept. 1828 and again in Nubia in Jan. 1829; he formed an extensive collection of Egyptian antiquities (over 2,000 objects)- added to by his descendants- of which a catalogue by Samuel Birch was published in 1880. He financed E. W. Lane's Arabic Lexikon and sent him to Egypt to collect materials; his wife, Lady Eleanor Grosvenor continued to support Lane after the Duke's death. He succeeded as the 4th Duke in 1847; he restored Alnwick Castle and greatly improved the estate; his papers are at Alnwick Castle; he died in Alnwick, 12 Feb. 1865, and was buried in the Percy Chapel. (<https://archive.griffith.ox.ac.uk/index.php/lord-prudhoe-collection>)

³³ <https://archive.griffith.ox.ac.uk/index.php/lord-prudhoe-collection>

³⁴ Drovetti, 1940, pp.373-374.

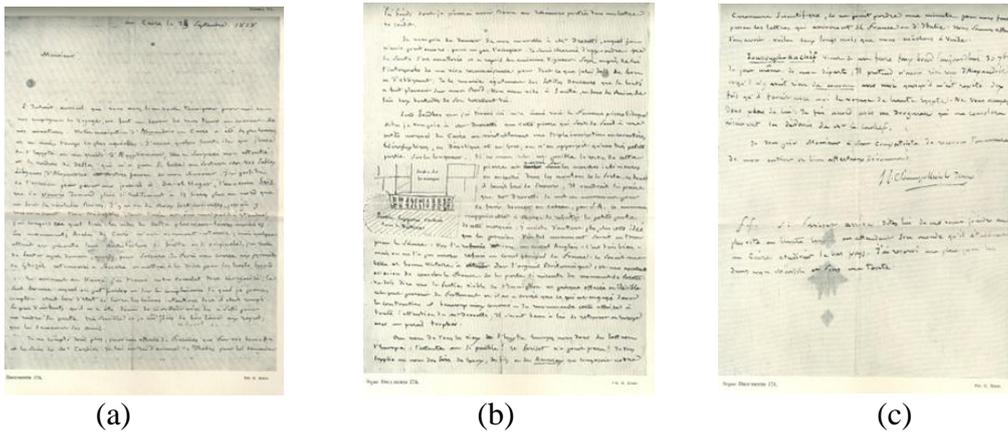


Fig. 4 (a, b, c) A letter from Champollion to Méchain the French Consul in Larnaka, with a figure for the mosque's entrance prepared by Champollion in 1828.

(Source: Drovetti Bernardino; Marro, Giovanni Il corpo epistolare di Bernardino Drovetti, Roma, Stampate nell'Istituto poligrafico dello Stato per la Reale Società di geografia d'Egitto, Société royale de géographie d'Égypte. Publications spéciales, Roma, 1940, 372-374, pl.VI-VIII).

Drovetti announced, in a letter that he sent on the 4th of May 1829 to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs that he could obtain the stela among other pieces³⁵ that were dedicated to the French King Charles X.³⁶ However the stone had to stay in the French consulate until the era of Mimaut, who was rewarded by Mohamed Ali at his departure by passing without checking his luggage by the customs administration.³⁷ After Mimaut transferred the stone to France and sold it to the Louvre, Burton's name disappears from the tablet, and Mimaut is listed as the stone's owner in its sale to the Louvre Museum³⁸ for nearly 10,083 francs (Fig.5).³⁹

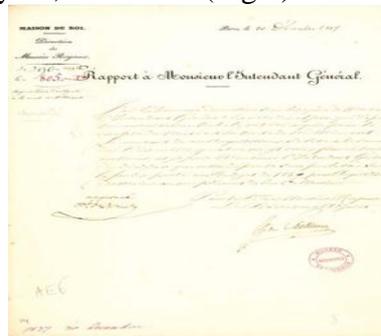


Fig. 5 The Louvre acquisition by purchase of the Mimaut collection
 Archive National de France, Reference code(s) : 20144775/1-20144775/34

Archives des musées nationaux, Département des Antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Louvre (série AE). An extract from the entry :

Acquisition à la vente de la collection Mimaut [14 p.] -1836, 9 juillet :

<https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/recherche/ir/rechercheGeneralisteResultat.action?ormCaller=GENERALISTE&searchText=Mimaut>

³⁵ In 1827, a considerable collection was offered to Charles X by Mohamed Ali, including a ring with horses (New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, reign of Ramesses II, 1279-1213 BC) now in the Louvre Museum.

³⁶ Auriant, 1978, p. 31.

³⁷ M. Ali, ed. R. A. Hamed, 2005, p. 130.

³⁸ "I have the honor to submit to the General Supervisor the note of the objects which according to his authorization were acquired on behalf of the Museum from Mr. Mimaut. The amount (cost) of this acquisition amounts to 10,083 francs and 40 centimes. I beg the Supervisor to decide that this expenditure should benefit.... December 1837 for acquisition intended to complement the collection. Signature: The Deputy Director of the Royal Museums." (20144775/1-20144775/34, 1836, Archive National de France)

³⁹ 20144775/1-20144775/34, 1836, Archive National de France.

Jomard introduced the second Amir Akhor Stone to the world in 1837, but with no mention of Burton because Jomard considered that Drovetti was both the stone's discoverer and the stone's owner.⁴⁰

Jomard wrote a note on the new copy of the Rosetta stone, which entered the Mimaut Collection⁴¹ and ignored completely the first Amir Akhor Stone which was recorded in 1800 in *Description de l'Égypte*,⁴² and ascertained the credibility of Drovetti.

6. Burton's Cast

Although making a cast of the Amir Akhor Stone was suggested as early as 1821 by Thomas Young, Burton did not carry this out until the turn of 1820s when he lost hope of appropriating the stone itself.

*“Other copies of the San inscription or decree of Canopus exist, and the plaster cast of a mutilated one, discovered by Mr. Burton, is in the possession of the Royal Society of Literature. Messrs Reinisch and Roesler, who accompanied Professor Lipsius in his journey, and who claim the honour of the discovery of the tablet at San have pointed out that this mutilated trilingual tablet is a copy of the decree of Canopus. In its present condition, it is quite useless for philological purposes, and it had served as a step of a mosque, its texts being consequently obliterated by the frequenters of that edifice”*⁴³

Burton described how it was difficult to finish the copying process under the French threatenings. On the opposite side, Drovetti described similar British threats.⁴⁴

The story ended with the Amir Akhor Stone being at the Louvre and the cast of the same half went to Britain.

7. Discussion

I. Ancient Egyptian blocks in Modern Constructions

Jomard in the *Description de l'Égypte* tried to explain the existence of important inscribed stones in Islamic and Coptic constructions due to the durability of these stones and to economic arrangements. He confirmed the importance of examining the thresholds of the doors and windows, which were more likely to be made of inscribed stones. The Arabic architect preferred utilizing these stones to cutting new blocks from distant mines. This was much easier for them. Such behavior resulted in the dismantling of major important ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman constructions.⁴⁵ The use of the stone as a threshold could be explained by the use of ancient Egyptian hard stones as particularly durable building materials.

This explanation was considered to be unsatisfactory as it was not followed in all constructions such as the support for domes and military architecture, where one might expect the strength of the stone to be particularly important. Probably the Pharaonic tablet at the entrance occupies the position of the 'imprimatur' preface of Ibn Umail. It also occupied the place of the tablet of learning held out to the pupil by Suhrawardt's visionary Shaikh. It marks the beginning or completion of a path of learning.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ «M. Jomard entretient la société d'une nouvelle copie de la pierre de Rosette, qui se trouve dans la belle collection d'antiquités rapportée d'Égypte par feu M. Mimaut, consul général de France à Alexandrie. M. Jomard remettra une note à ce sujet au comité du Bulletin ». (Bulletin de la société de géographie 1837, p. 192)

⁴¹Bulletin de la société de géographie 1837, p. 192.

⁴² « M. Jomard communique de nouveaux détails qu'il vient de recevoir de M. le Chevalier Drovetti, sur une inscription gravée sur pierre, et rapportée d'Égypte par feu M. Mimaut. Cette pierre, où se trouve reproduite l'inscription de Rosette servait de seuil à l'entrée d'une mosquée du Caire, et les caractères en sont malheureusement très usés elle avait été découverte par M. Drovetti, qui l'avait fait ensuite transporter au consulat de France » Bulletin de la société de géographie 1837, p.194.

⁴³ Murray, 1870, p. 371.

⁴⁴ Auriant, 1978, p. 32.

⁴⁵ *Description de l'Égypte*, p. 313.

⁴⁶ Jakeman, 1993, p. 155.

For Creswell these stones as thresholds “*made people feel that they were trampling on idolatry*”,⁴⁷ but for Wallis Budge, it was a continuation of an ancient habit, as kings used stela and blocks from their predecessors’ buildings. The reuse of blocks and stones was supposed to bring good fortune and was believed to have magical powers.⁴⁸

The Mamluks then the Ottomans probably did not understand the texts of the stelae but they believed in the importance of positioning these stones at the entrance, because of their strength as durable material or for the strong spiritual power that would be granted to the visitors who would pass over these stones to enter the mosque or the *Khanqah*. The threshold was important, from a spiritual point of view, in Islamic constructions, so an objection can be made to Creswell’s explanation (the threshold as an area of disdain) because the Muslim used to take off his shoes and press on the threshold with his right foot.⁴⁹

Beside the mosque of Amir Akhor in the present Citadel square, there was a sarcophagus that left Egypt with other pieces for the British Museum. It was known as “Lover’s Fountain” and originally came from under the entrance of Amir Akhor Mosque. This coincides with the mosque’s builder being so interested in utilizing Ancient Egyptian elements in his two mosques (Fig.7).⁵⁰ The position of this sarcophagus in Cairo may be seen in one of the drawings belonging to Sir Robert Ainslie, now in the British Museum (Fig.6). It occupied a niche under the steps of a mosque, and served as the basin of a fountain, so it was called the Lovers’ fountain, because of the popular belief that its water possessed the power of curing love.⁵¹ In Ottoman and Mamluk times, Egyptians believed in the healing power of ancient Egyptians and their tools or belongings,⁵² despite considering them “infidels.”⁵³



Fig.6, Grey granite sarcophagus of Hapmen, high official, later re-used as a ritual bath in Mosque in Cairo, formerly known as the "Lovers' Fountain", 26th Dynasty, Donated by: George III, King of the United Kingdom, in 1802, BM/Big number

EA23. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA23

⁴⁷ Creswell, 1978, p. 101.

⁴⁸ Budge, 1920, pp.85-87.

⁴⁹ Lane, 2000, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Bret, 1998, p. 214.

⁵¹ Long, 1836, p.134.

⁵² Daly, 124, p.124

⁵³ Mohamed, 2016, p.120

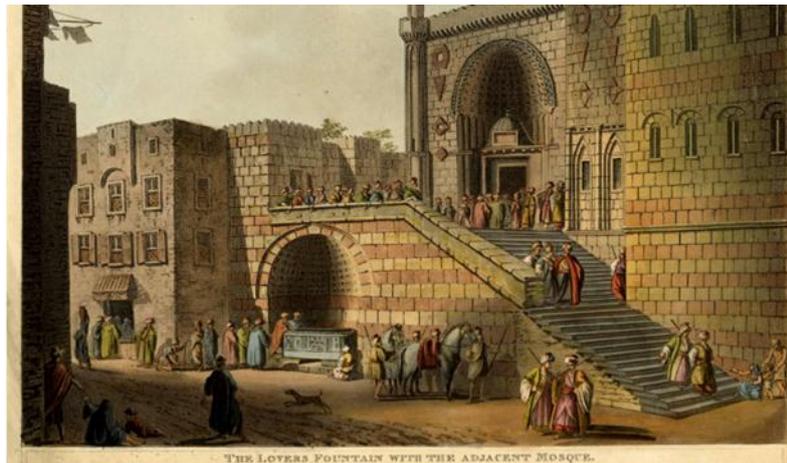


Fig.7, The lovers' fountain with the adjacent mosque, 1802.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1871-1209-2954

II. Why did the Amir Akhor Stone go to France, not to Britain?

The strong relationship between Mohamed Ali and his son Ibrahim on the one hand and Drovetti on the other may explain why the Amir Akhor Stone entered the Louvre as C122.

A letter of Ibrahim's to Drovetti gives the impression that Ibrahim was very interested in France, and that the French were similarly inclined toward Egypt.⁵⁴

Before Ibrahim, Mohamed Ali had strong relations with France, Jomard, and Drovetti. Mohamed Ali left no doubt about his affection: "See what I owed to France, what I still owe to her, France gave me the man who formed for me in 3 years an arsenal and a formidable navy. A Frenchman, who became one of us, organized a regular army for me. It is to France that I owe what I am and it is to her that I want to owe what I will be (May 1832)".⁵⁵

The strong relationship between Drovetti and Mohamed Ali was admitted. Even the reports of British consul general Salt to his Foreign Office reveal the close ties between Drovetti and Mohamed Ali:

*"The affairs of Egypt, as far as the British interests are concerned assume a more precarious aspect from day to day. The alliance, as we can call it, between his highness [probably Mohamed Ali] and the French authorities is getting closer every day and the plans of the French government are constantly gaining ground..... The consul-General of France, Mr. Drovetti is openly admitted to the councils of his highness both in Cairo and Alexandria....."*⁵⁶

Drovetti did not receive the Amir Akhor Stone directly from Mohamed Ali but from Ibrahim. Upon the death of the official responsible for the mosques and Al-Awqaf, the British were sure that because of the strong relationship between Ibrahim and Drovetti, the stone would soon be in France⁵⁷. Thomas Young remarked that:

⁵⁴ Marro, 1848-1949, pp. 75-76. The letter text:

Au terme de la campagne de Moree Modon, 8 Mars 1828.

Monsieur et cher ami chevalier Drovetti

Votre chère lettre en langue turque m'est bien parvenue ? Je ne doute – et vous en êtes convaincu- combien cette lettre m'a cause de plaisir. En effet, depuis longtemps, je désirais recevoir des nouvelles de mon ancien et sincère ami Drovetti, mais J'aurais désiré que ces nouvelles fussent tracées en caractères latins et en langue française. Nul doute qu'elle aurait contenu, outre vos chères nouvelles, quelques autres détails intéressants. Ainsi, écrivez-moi ce que vous avez vu, ce que vous avez fait dans ces contrées que je désire tant voir (la France)

⁵⁵ Tagher, 1849-1949, pp 1-18.

⁵⁶ Auriant, 1978, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Auriant, 1978, p. 31.

“Ibrahim Pasha told Drovetti that *“he might not only take the stone, but the whole mosque if he liked”*⁵⁸

Since Mohamed Ali probably wanted to compensate the French with a considerable collection of antiquities, so he closed his eyes when Ibrahim allowed Drovetti to take the Amir Akhor stone. France asked through Drovetti for Mohamed Ali’s support in the war against Algeria but Mohamed Ali did not respond, however, to France’s request through Drovetti for support for its invasion of Algeria.⁵⁹

In any case, the stone remained in Egypt until Mimaut’s retirement; Drovetti could apparently appropriate the Amir Akhor Stone but not export it as his own property. Perhaps this indicates either that Mohamed Ali was unaware or unsupportive of Ibrahim’s decision.

Another British letter confirms that the tablet was dedicated by Mohamed Ali to Drovetti; probably the name of Mohamed Ali was added because the legal papers must carry his name as the tablet’s donor even though Ibrahim actually made the donation.

Fagan suggests that: *“Ibrahim allowed Drovetti to take the stone on one condition: announcing that Mohamed Ali wants the stone for himself so the public criticism would be less.”*⁶⁰ Mohamed Ali had justified his refusal to grant announced refusal to grant the stone to any country on the grounds that *“the public would refuse granting part of the mosque to foreigners”*. Increased disagreements between Mohamed Ali and his son Ibrahim during the Syrian war may explain Ibrahim’s reversal of his father’s earlier order and granting the stone to the French consuls.⁶¹

III. Are there two parts of the Amir Akhor Stone or one part?

Those who already knew of the two parts of the Amir Akhor Stone like Jomard and Thomas Young did not explain what had happened to the part found earlier (or the Caristie Stone); they concentrated instead on the second part without explaining what had happened to the first part, which had been stored in the court of the *Institut d’Égypte*. Champollion did not see the Caristie Stone which had been reported at the Institut’s courtyard, so he made many visits to the mosque in search of another fragment of the stone.⁶² The only reference to both the Caristie Stone and the Burton tablet suggested that the Caristie Stone had been returned to the mosque, but this was not in line with either Mohamed Ali’s or early 19th century attitudes toward ancient Egyptian relics.

In 1836 Mohamed Ali ordered the delivery of an ancient stone from the small, ruined Mahmoudya Mosque in Alexandria in 1836 and did not rebuild the mosque.⁶³ Thus M. Jungfleisch’s contention⁶⁴ that the Caristie Stone had been returned to its original place in the mosque is not in keeping with Mohamed Ali’s usual behavior.

Although the French were aware of both chapters of the story, their silence is especially noteworthy in view of what the British did as soon as they knew that Drovetti could acquire the Amir Akhor Stone. Burton reached Egypt knowing of both the Caristie Stone that had been in the Institut d’Égypte and advice to copy the text of the stone in the Amir Akhor Mosque. Unable to find the *Institut*’s part of the

⁵⁸ Young, 1855, p.442

⁵⁹ Abdel-Hafez, 2000, pp. 473-526.

⁶⁰ Fagan, 1992, p96.

⁶¹ The dispute between Mohamed Ali and his son Ibrahim began mostly during Syrian war, exchanged letters between them expressed this dispute and many factors specially messengers spoiled the matter more and more. (Al-Ganayni, 2012,199-211)

⁶² Jungfleisch, 1953, pp 73 -87.

⁶³ Ali, 2016, p. 132.

⁶⁴ Jungfleisch, 1953, pp 73 -87.

stone in 1822, Burton kept searching for the trilingual tablet and found it by chance in the Amir Akhor Mosque, the same mosque where Caristie had found the first part of the stone 25 years earlier.

IV. The significance of such multilingual inscriptions

Comparisons with the Greek version of such multilingual texts played a fundamental role in deciphering both the hieroglyphic and demotic scripts of ancient Egyptians. Nineteenth-century scholars raced to copy any texts which could help them add new hieroglyphic vocabulary. They worked hard to copy bilingual or trilingual texts themselves and shared them with sympathetic fellow decipherers. The race to take possession of the Menouf Stone,⁶⁵ or failing that, to obtain a lithographic copy of it, is one example of this,⁶⁶ and the struggle over the stone from the Amir Akhor Mosque is another.

The poor state of its preservation was probably the reason the Amir Akhor Mosque Stone, unlike the Menouf Stone, was not documented in the *Description de l'Égypte*. As Champollion himself later stressed the importance of collecting such bilingual and trilingual stones : « *Il est du plus grand intérêt, pour les études historiques et philologique, de chercher dans les ruines de l'Égypte des décrets bilingues, semblables à celui que porte la pierre de Rosette. Ces stèles existaient en très grand nombre dans les temples égyptiens des trois ordres. Des fouilles seront donc dirigées dans l'enceinte de ces temples, pour découvrir de tels monuments, par le secours desquels le déchiffrement des textes hiéroglyphiques ferait un pas immense* »⁶⁷

The race for ownership of such trilingual stones and copies of them had both negative and positive aspects. The British press attacked the French winners,⁶⁸ but more positively encouraged the spread of knowledge about reading hieroglyphs (Fig. 8). After obtaining a lithograph of the Burton Tablet or Amir Akhor Stone, the Royal Society of Literature quickly published the text and worked hard to spread knowledge of hieroglyphs to anyone who was interested.⁶⁹

• This seemed to be peculiarly fitting for a Society whose publication of hieroglyphic inscriptions (separately from its own transactions) has done so much for their study, and so greatly excited the public mind. Copies of these fasciculi (not confined to members), we should add, for general information, are yet to be procured.

Fig.8, Part of an article (Literary and Learned Burton's Trilingual Tablet: Hieroglyphics) published in "The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Letters, Arts, Sciences, Etc. No. 655. Saturday, August 8, 1829" Colburn, H 1829, p. 522.

⁶⁵ In autumn 1799, Jollois and Dubois-Aymé, members of Bonaparte's expedition, had found the Menouf bilingual stone, with Demotic-Greek text (Mairs, 2020, pp. 20-35) it was utilized as a bench at the entrance of a modern house at Menouf. (Daressy, M. G. Pierre bilingue de Menouf, ASAE, Tome XXIII, pp49-52) In October 1820, French naturalist Fredric Cailliaud tracked the Menouf Stone and was led to a local prison where the Menouf Stone was used in construction. Cailliaud was the last to see the Menouf stone, George Daressy made enquiries about it in 1920s, but even the prison where the stone was had long gone and more recent constructions were established instead of it. Champollion and Young made a major effort to get a copy of the Menouf Stone lithograph but they could not. (Mairs, 2020, pp. 20-35)

⁶⁶ Mairs, 2020, pp. 20-35.

⁶⁷ Champollion, 1909, p 437.

⁶⁸ For example: Important Egyptian Antiquity, Morning Post: Tuesday 07 July 1829.

⁶⁹ *The Spirit of the English Magazines* 1830, p. 172

V. Understanding Mohamed Ali's and Ibrahim's attitude toward the Amir Akhor Stone

Since both Mohamed Ali and Ibrahim were in power during the incident of the Amir Akhor Stone, their attitudes toward ancient Egypt and its antiquities are very important. Ibrahim presented a gilded Persian sword to Rosellini. On the anniversary of the coronation of the French king, Ibrahim also presented Champollion with a copy of Rosellini's sword. This probably reflected his gratitude for the excellent drawings made by Champollion:⁷⁰

*“As a testament to the satisfaction he had had at seeing the beautiful drawings of ancient Egyptian bas-reliefs which filled his portfolios” (en témoignage de la satisfaction qu'il avait eue à voir les beaux dessins de bas-reliefs antiques qui remplissaient ses portefeuilles)*⁷¹

Mohamed Ali's praise of Champollion's drawings of antiquities may have been mere diplomacy, but the pasha's request that the French scholar furnish a translation of the text on an Alexandrian obelisk and a sketch of ancient Egyptian history suggests real intellectual curiosity.

Mohamed Ali voiced his desire to promote scholarship on hieroglyphs in Egypt as follows:

*« De toutes les doctrines de l'Europe, Je ne réclame pour moi et mon peuple, que la doctrine du déchiffreur des hiéroglyphes »*⁷²

Ibrahim joined Champollion and Mimaut in an excavation in 1829 in Alexandria near “Pompey's Pillar” (Al-Sawari) which uncovered such antiquities as a headless statue of Bacchus.⁷³

In a letter to Dacier, Champollion called Mohamed Ali “Horus-Typhon.”

Horus suggests Mohamed Ali's beneficent side—the creator and modernizer of Egypt, but Typhon refers to the murderous god who snatched the valley of the Nile from the shadows but subjected his people to inhuman rule and permanent and universal drudgery in erecting an endless pyramid.⁷⁴

An important question arises here: Did Mohamed Ali sell antiquities for cash? No document so far can give a positive answer to this question but the deeds of Mohamed Ali suggest that he promoted his own interests with gifts of Egyptian antiquities. In the case of the Amir Akhor stone, Burton suggested rebuilding and restoring the mosque in return for appropriating the Amir Akhor stone. When Burton applied to the British authorities to fund the rebuilding of the Amir Akhor mosque, the British considered Burton's proposal as Mohamed Ali's request as a price for the stone.

Whether Mohamed Ali was aware of Ibrahim's gift to France or not; the French attitude of Mohamed Ali was a fact. He commented on this attitude as follows *“Whether France helps me or not, it will not change my gratitude to her. Throughout my life, I will be grateful and appreciative for what France has done for me, and I will bequeath this attitude to my children, and I will always advise them to always remain under the protection of France”*.

VI. Antiquities administration under Mohamed Ali: the case of the Amir Akhor Stone

The request to remove the Amir Akhor Stone was made by the dragoman of the British Consulate to *Habib Effendi, Mamur Diwan Khedive*, who presented it to

⁷⁰ Wiet, 1959, p.233

⁷¹ Douin, 1935, p. 357.

⁷² Wiet, 1959, p.233

⁷³ Abdel-Hafez , 2000, pp. 473 - 526.

⁷⁴ Lacouture, 1988, p. 441.

Mohamed Ali. Then *Habib Effendi* delivered Mohamed Ali's decision to the applicants. This procedure might lead us to suppose that the *Diwan Khedive* in this case was serving as a predecessor of the later *Service des Antiquités*. However, the involvement of the *Diwan Khedive* in the antiquities' affairs came mainly from the personal trust of Mohamed Ali in *Habib Effendi*, the *Mamur of Diwan Khedive*.

Habib Effendi can be considered as the founder of the *Diwan Khedive*. He continued in his job as *Mamur* (Director) of *Diwan Khedive* from 1824 to 1838, when Mohamed Ali issued an order that his grandson (who later ruled as Abbas Hilmi I) replace him as director of the *Diwan Khedive*. When *Habib Effendi* was made to retire because of old age, Mohamed Ali certified him as efficient and honest and granted him his full salary as a pension.⁷⁵

Both *Habib* and *Amin Effendis* spared no effort in carrying out Mohamed Ali's orders concerning the *Amir Akhor Stone*, refusing tempting requests to deliver the stone to either the British or the French.⁷⁶ The *Amir Akhor Stone* was preserved by *Amin Effendi* of the Buildings Administration, which kept the stone after it was extracted from the *Amir Akhor Mosque*. *Amin Effendi* received the order to deliver the stone firstly to *Burton*, who was allowed to copy it, then to *Drovetti*, who was allowed to collect it once *Ibrahim Pasha* became responsible for the mosques.⁷⁷

VII. Postscript: Antiquities administration under Khedive Ismail: retention of the Tanis Stone in contrast to the earlier export of the Amir Akhor Stone

By the reign of Mohamed Aly's grandson *Ismail* (1863-79), Egyptians had become much more aware of the significance of such trilingual stones. Mohamed Ali's order concerning the *Amir Akhor Mosque Stone* described it as follows: "*black stone with old writing on both sides, the British want to take it with them as it is one of the antiquities*".

In 1866, in contrast, when *Karl Lepsius* excavated the trilingual "*Tanis Stone*" or "*Stela of Canopus*," (Fig. 9), there was no question of allowing it to be exported. Egypt now had a full-fledged Antiquities Service (under French administration), and it was deposited in the *Museum of Egyptian Antiquities at Boulaq*. Only casts of it were exported to such museums as the *Royal Museum of Berlin*, the *British Museum*, and the *Smithsonian*.

⁷⁵ Al-Swefy, 1988, p. 20.

⁷⁶ ff. 19-25, 46 John Barker, Consul-General in Egypt; horticulturist: Correspondence with J. Burton: 1828-1830, British Library.

⁷⁷ Auriant, 1978, p. 30.

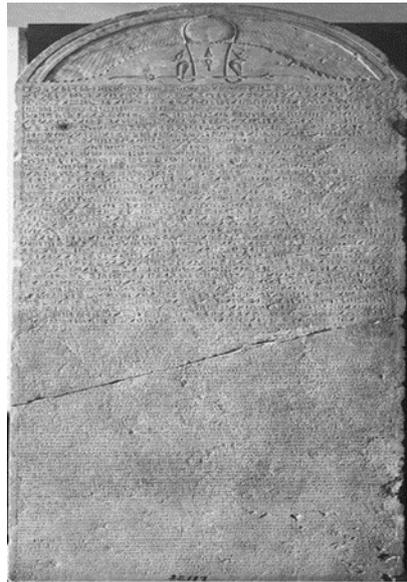


Fig. 9 Tanis Stone with the trilingual text of the Canopus Decree now in Cairo, Egyptian Museum, inv. CG 22187 (Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions Part I: Greek, Bilingual, and Trilingual Inscriptions from Egypt Volume 1. Alexandria and the Delta (Nos. 1–206), Ed. Bowman, Crowther, Mairs, Savvopoulos Oxford University Press, 2020, p.222)

When Ismail accepted the American request for a cast of the Tanis Stone, a decree was issued by the Egyptian government describing the monument as “*the stone of three inscriptions.*” Egyptian decrees specifically mentioning trilingual stones made it clear that they would no longer be exported.⁷⁸

Although Ismail did allow obelisks and other antiquities to be exported, trilingual stones were now recognized as so important that they must be kept in Egyptian territory.⁷⁹

VIII. The Rivalries of the Consul Collectors

During the 19th century, consuls had been the main players on the ground of collecting antiquities in modern Egypt. Auriant described them, in modern Egypt, saying: “*The foreign consuls were in Egypt “a kind of kings” ... “Each consulate was a government in miniature and all the foreigners ... were supposed to be under the exclusive protection of their consulate”*⁸⁰

When Jomard described the Amir Akhor Stone in the “*Description de l’Égypte*” he wished that the stone had been found when Maillet⁸¹ was general consul of France in Egypt.⁸² He could have produced, in the 1730s, an early *Description de l’Égypte*.⁸³

⁷⁸ Al-Damasy, 2004, pp381-479.

⁷⁹ For more details about Ismail and his gifts of antiquities and monuments: France, 1991, pp. 141-143; Edwards, 1878, p. 134; Jones, Jonathan-“shards of golden age” The Guardian(02/10/2003)/ Reid, 2003, p198; HC Deb 16 February 1877 vol. 232 c463/ Farman, 1882, pp. 879-889/ Dawson, (15/5/1890), p.31.

⁸⁰ Auriant, 1978, pp. 12-13.

⁸¹ « *Si, par bonheur, le consul Maillet, du temps duquel, sans doute, la pierre occupoit déjà cette même place, l’eut découverte intacte et envoyée aussitôt en France, on auroit possédé dès cette époque un monument plus précieux que la pierre de Rosette même, et aborde avec plus d’avantage le problème des hiéroglyphes ; car il est plus étendu que cette pierre, et divise, comme celle-ci, en trois parties....*» *Description de l’Égypte*, 1818, p. 10.

⁸² Benoît de Maillet (1656 –1738) was a well-travelled French diplomat and natural historian. He was French consul in Egypt from 1692 to 1708. He visited the interior of the Great Pyramid more than forty times, corresponded with scholars in France, and developed an outline scheme for the exploration of Ancient Egypt which acted as a blueprint for Napoleon's expedition a century later. "We are told," he reported, "that there are still in Upper Egypt temples of which the blue or gilded vaultings are still as beautiful as if they had just been finished; there are idols of a prodigious size; columns without number" (Fagan,1992, p. 70).

⁸³ *Description de l’Égypte*, 1818, p. 10.

The consul and his attitude controlled to a great extent who acquired what of Egypt's antiquities well into the 19th century.

Champollion had a kind of direct relationship with Mohamed Ali. The latter had certain requests from Champollion but even this proximity did not allow Champollion to ask Mohamed Ali directly for the Amir Akhor stone. Champollion directed his request to Drovetti who derailed Champollion's research out of jealousy.⁸⁴

However, the relationship between Champollion and Mimaut was better. According to Champollion: "*Mimaut is a man who went to my heart (and was) for me everything Drovetti should have been. « Mimaut est un homme qui m'est allée au cœur (et a été) pour moi tout ce que Drovetti aurait dû être »*"⁸⁵.

Consular authority in acquiring antiquities became more limited after Auguste Mariette's appointment as Antiquities director in 1858 and again after Great Britain's occupation of the country in 1882.

IX. Modern Egyptian awareness of the value of trilingual stones

Egyptians have known about trilingual stones for a long time. Al-Maqrizi (1364-1442) wrote about Ancient Egyptian inscriptions: "*They (the ancient Egyptians) had their own language, their inscriptions were three: the public's inscriptions the priests' inscription which was known as the special group abbreviated inscription and the kings' inscription*".⁸⁶

A few comments by Egyptians show their awareness of the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone. Those who were either close to Champollion such as Joseph Agoub⁸⁷ or living in France at that time, like Rifaa Al-Tahtawy, were contemporary with the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone.

Joseph Agoub's writings in the 1820s show his complete awareness of the value of Champollion's achievement; this was probably because of his residence in France and his direct relationship with Champollion himself.⁸⁸

Rifaa Al-Tahtawi became aware of his pharaonic heritage in the heat of the great quarrel in Europe over the Rosetta stone. Jomard was trying too to decipher hieroglyphs, but Champollion won the competition, deciphering hieroglyphs in 1822 and organizing the Egyptian gallery in the Louvre in 1827. This emotional and intellectual atmosphere led Rifaa Al-Tahtawy to a different attitude towards Ancient Egypt, beyond that of some Arabic texts which presented national antiquities to him as idols from a foreign and hostile world or superstitions that relegated the image of ancient Egypt to the realm of witchcraft. Al-Tahtawy was able to find his own soul. From Paris, he corrected many mistakes in the writings of Arab historians. He even dared to protest against the liberality of Mohamed-Ali, who had just offered an obelisk to King Louis-Philippe. Rifaa Al-Tahtawy addressed to Mohamed Ali, in 1835, a memorandum for the protection of Egyptian antiquities.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Wiet, 1943, p 25.

⁸⁵ Lacouture, 1988, p. 442.

⁸⁶ Al Maqrīzī, 1998, p. 736.

⁸⁷ Born in Cairo in 1795 to an Armenian father and a Syrian mother. Agoub had left Egypt with his parents in the wake of the withdrawal of the French troops and settled in Marseille. He was author and had many poems, also he remained with the Egyptian mission during most of their stay in France, he even taught them French-Arabic translation at the College Louis le-Grand. He could tap into the Egyptomania. His main claim to fame was a collection of poems entitled *La Lyre Brisée* (1824), which was translated by al-Tahtawy in 1827 and was printed by the same publishing house as the original (Dondey-Dupre). It was also the first Arabic translation of any European literary work. In the book, Agoub also included poems in praise of Mohammed Ali, so the author was brought to the attention of the Egyptian Court. Presumably at Jomard's instigation, and its author was appointed Jomard's personal assistant. (Newman, 2012, p.129.)

⁸⁸ Agoub, 1823, p 16.

⁸⁹ Louca, 1970, p. 70.

On the popular level, however, when Champollion was in Nubia in 1829, he asked an adult resident there: *Do you know who built this temple (Temple of Derr or el-Derr)?* The man answered immediately that he was too young to know, but the elders of the region seemed to agree that this temple had been built three hundred thousand years before Islam. The elders were uncertain whether it had been the French, the British, or the Russians who had built this great work.⁹⁰

This answer suggests that modern political powers had made such an impact on the general population that they attributed the erection of the great Egyptian temples to these foreigners.

Conclusion

The Mamluks' reuse of ancient Egyptian stones with inscriptions, such as the trilingual stone in the Amir Akhor Mosque, was not unusual. Al Maqrizi (1364-1442) even correctly identified the three ancient Egyptian scripts: hieroglyphs (for the kings), hieratic (for the priests), and demotic for the public.

There are two chapters to the story of the Amir Akhor Stone. The first began in 1800 when French officer Caristie became the first to notice the stone in the mosque and document it. The stone was later collected and stored in the *Institut d'Égypte*, where it remained along with other antiquities after the French evacuated Egypt in 1801. After the French left, both Ottoman and--for a time--British approval seems to have been necessary to appropriate certain antiquities or monuments.

The second chapter began when Burton discovered the threshold stone of the Amir Akhor Mosque. Burton, Champollion, and Drovetti all tried to acquire the stone for museums back home. The contest to appropriate the Amir Akhor Stone ended with the second stone as part of the French consul Mimaut's collection.

Probably, there were two halves of the Amir Akhor Stone; the first was used as a windowsill of the mosque. It was discovered and collected in 1800. The second was used as a threshold for one of the entrances to the mosque; it was discovered in the 1820s.

The disposition of the Rosetta Stone (discovered in 1799), the second Amir Akhor Stone of the 1820s, and the Tanis Stone of 1866 shows a certain progression. The Rosetta Stone was collected by the French but seized by the British in 1801. Under Article XVI of the treaty of Capitulation, General Hutchison took possession of the Stone and other antiquities and dispatched them to England. As for the second Amir Akhor Stone, Mohamed Ali refused to give it to Burton, but the French consuls employed their close ties to both Ibrahim and Mohamed Ali to appropriate the Stone and send it to France. The fate of the Tanis Stone, excavated in 1866, was completely different. By the time of Khedive Ismail, with widespread recognition of the extreme value of trilingual stones, there was no question of exporting the original to Europe.

The original was deposited in Cairo's Museum of Antiquities at Boulaq, and European museums received only casts and copies of the text. Although a Frenchman directed Egypt's antiquities museum in Cairo, Egyptian recognition of the value of trilingual stones for unlocking the secrets of their pharaonic heritage had taken a long step forward.

Native Egyptians' awareness of the decipherment of the Rosetta stone's was nearly null during the first half of the 19th century. Some Egyptians abroad, in the 1820s, were aware of Champollion's achievement, probably as a result of Champollion's interest in learning Coptic and his communication with the Egyptians abroad to teach

⁹⁰ Lacouture, 1988, p. 427.

him this language. According to Egypt's ruler Mohamed Ali, the Egyptian public was the reason for his refusal to give the Amir Akhor Stone to Burton, as he expected their refusal to grant a block from a mosque to foreigners.

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Plates



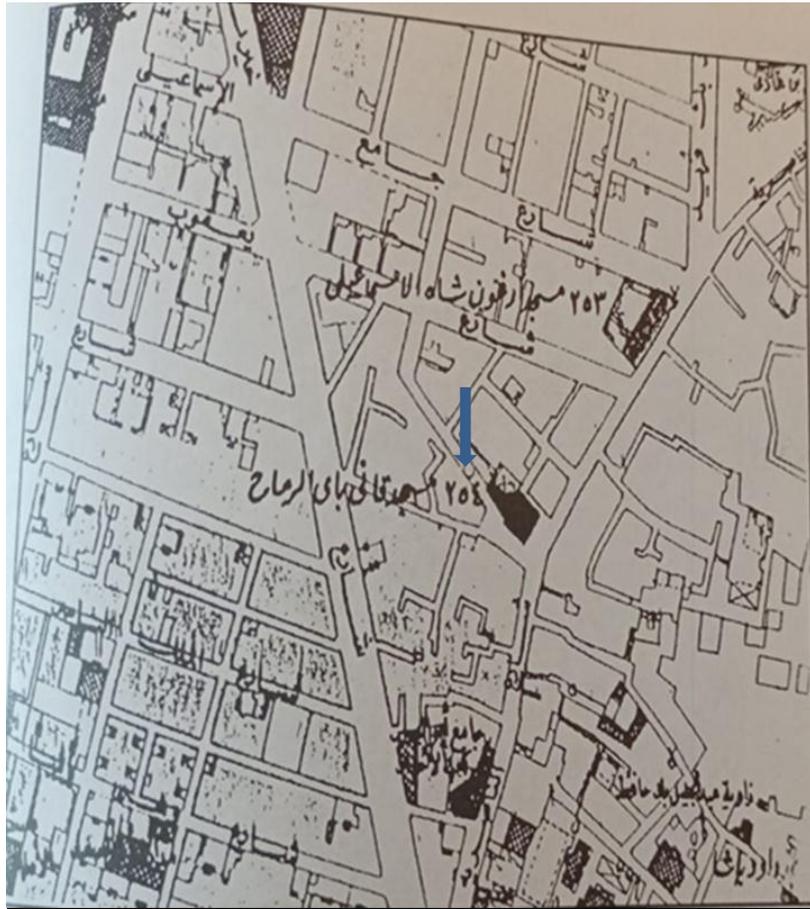
Pl. I the main façade of *Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah Madrassa & Mosque*, with a stone ramp, in the Citadel Square.
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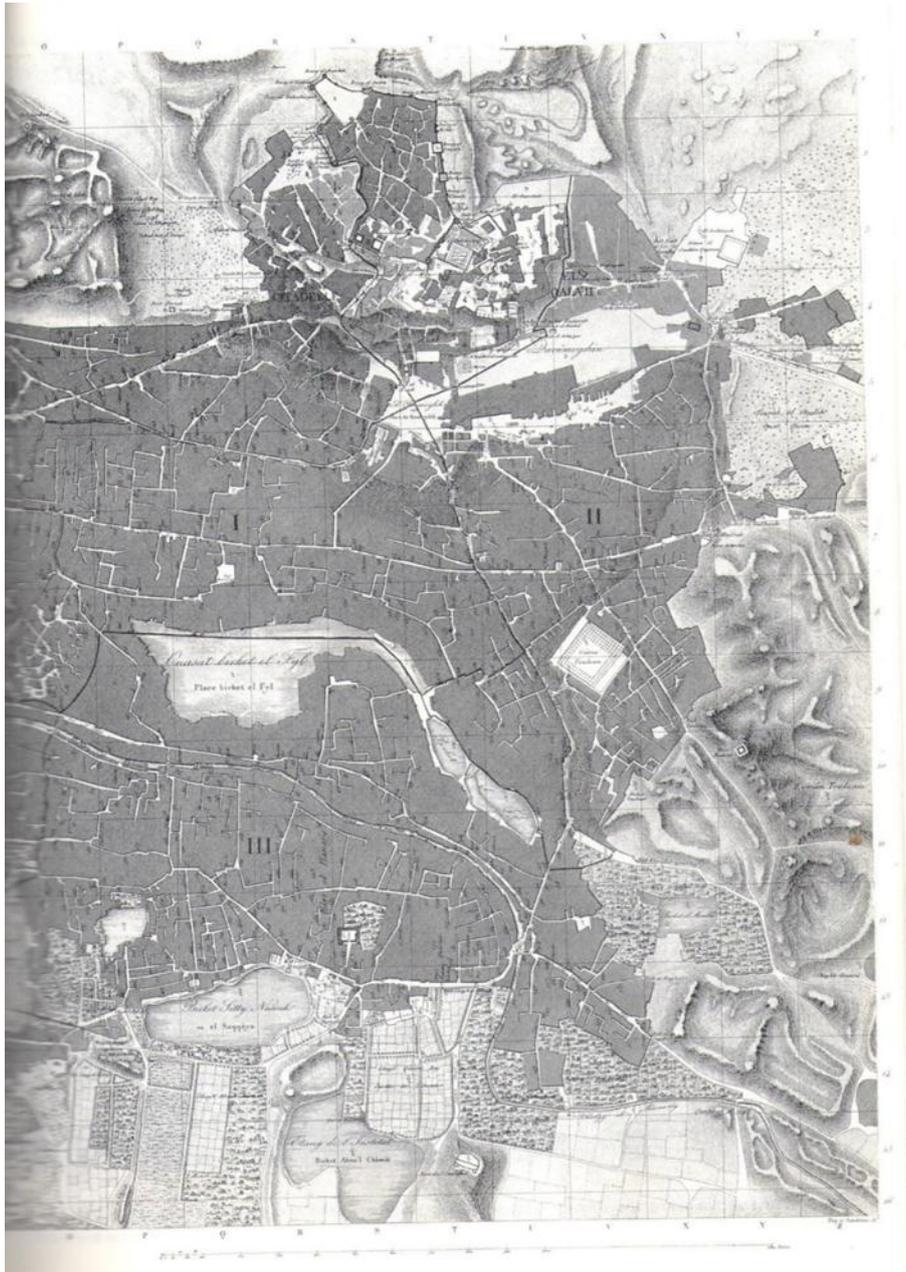
Pl. I, 2

Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah Madrassa & Mosque (*en-Nasrieh*) Cairo
Photograph 1916 to 1921, by Creswell, Victoria & Albert Museum
https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?id_place=THES274011 –



Pl. I, 3

Present Location of Madrassa & Mosque *Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah* in *en-Nasrieh* carrying no. 254 as an Islamic monument near *Bet el-Sennary* and *Sayda Zaynab* mosque (Rezq, Assem Atlas of Islamic and Coptic Architecture in Cairo, Part 3, vol.2, Madbouly, Cairo, p.1850)



Pl. I, 4

The map for Cairo including the location of Madrassa & Mosque *Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah* in *en-Nasrieh* (plate 26, E.M, Vol,1 carreau S-13) *Description de l'Egypte publiee par les ordres de Napoleon Bonaparte* (Edition Complete) AUC press, 1997, p592.



Pl. II

The entrance portal of Madrasa & Mosque *Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah* built in 1506,
(*en-Nasrieh*), Cairo

Photograph by K.A.C. Creswell, 1916 to 1921.

©Victoria&Albert Museum, London

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1285300/entrance-portal-of-the-mosque-photograph-creswell-keppel-archibald/>

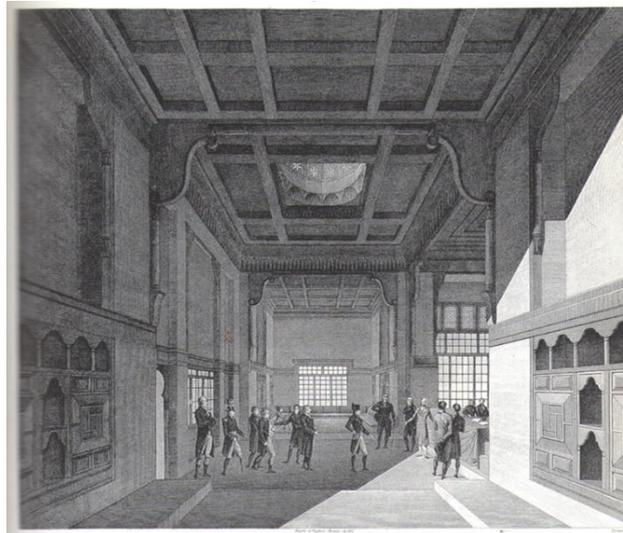


Pl. II, 2

The second entrance of Madrassa & Mosque of *Qany Bay Qurra El-Rammah* in (*en-Nasrieh*), Cairo, in the northern façade of the Madrassa

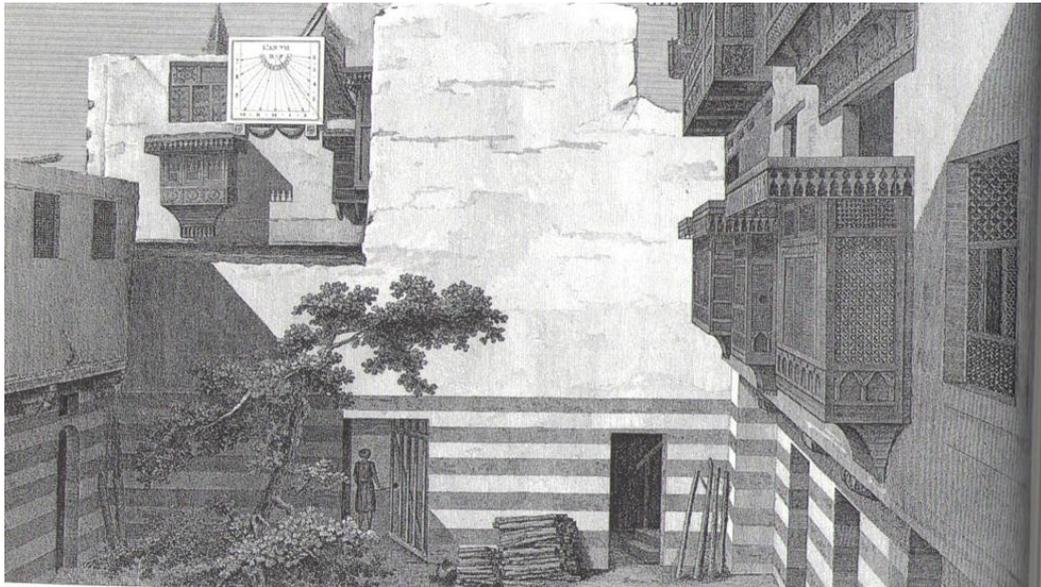
Maher, Soad Mosques of Egypt & its valid Saints, part 4, Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, Cairo, 1971, plate190, p495.

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Pl. III

L'institut d'Egypte 1800s (view for the scientists of the French Campaign who used to make their meetings in the House of Hassan Kachef where was the institute d'Egypte
Description de l'Egypte publiée par les ordres de Napoléon Bonaparte (Edition Complete) AUC press , 1997,p624.



Pl. III, 2

Interior view of one of the courts of Hassan Kachef House (*Institut d’Egypte*)
Description de l’Egypte publiée par les ordres de Napoléon Bonaparte (Edition Complete)
AUC Press, 1997, p.630.