

A unique fragmented Royal Stela of king Horemheb from Saqqara

أجزاء من لوحة ملكية نادرة للملك حور محب من سقارة

Ahmed M. Osman

Associated Prof., Ancient Egyptian dept., Faculty of Archaeology and Tourism
Guidance, Miser University for Science and Technology, 6th October, Egypt.

Ahmed.osman@must.edu.eg

Abstract

A significant limestone stela discovered at the eastern side of Tabet El-Geesh, a fresh excavation site located in south Saqqara between the Cairo University excavations and the late sixth dynasty cemetery of Pepi I, Pepi II and Merenre. The stela belongs to King Horemheb, the last king of the 18th Dynasty. Even though he has a non-royal tomb at Saqqara, but this artefact is a mere proof of his royal existence at Saqqara, though he moved to the capital Thebes. It was found in a small room thought to be part of a New Kingdom temple.

The stela is decorated with only two religious' scenes of King Horemheb. First, the king offers papyri flowers to God Osiris, while the second one has the king offering the *nw* jars to God Ptah of Memphis.

Keywords: Tabet El-Geesh Elsharkia, Horemheb, round stela, Saqqara, *Ptah Sokar Osiris, Osiris Khenti Imenty.*

المخلص

تم اكتشاف لوحة رائعة من الحجر الجيري بتبة الجيش الشرقية، موقع حفائر البعثة المشتركة لجامعة مصر للعلوم والتكنولوجيا والمجلس الأعلى للآثار، والذي يقع في جنوب سقارة بين موقع حفائر جامعة القاهرة وجبانتي بيبي الأول ومري إن رع. اللوحة تعود للملك حورمحب، آخر ملوك الأسرة الثامنة عشر. على الرغم من أن لديه قبراً غير ملكي في سقارة أي قبل أن يتولى العرش، إلا أن هذه القطعة الأثرية هي مجرد دليل على وجوده الملكي في سقارة، على الرغم من انتقاله إلى العاصمة طيبة. وقد عثر عليها في غرفة صغيرة يعتقد أنها جزء من معبد يعود تاريخه إلى عصر الدولة الحديثة.

تم تزيين اللوحة بمنظرين دينيين للملك حورمحب. أولاً وهو يقدم زهور البردي إلى أوزيريس، بينما يقدم إنائي النوف في المنظر الثاني إلى الإله بتاح سوكر ممفيس.

الكلمات الدالة: تبة الجيش الشرقية – حور محب – لوحة مستديرة القمة – سقارة – بتاح سوكر أوزيريس – أوزيريس خنتي إمنتي.

1. Introduction

For the first time a royal discovery for King Horemheb was discovered at Tabet El-Geesh El-Sharkia Excavations (TEE)¹, the Excavations of “Misr University for Science and Technology” (MUST), during the season of December 2021. The stela remains until present the only discovery for King Horemheb at Saqqara. Additionally, more significance was enhanced during the same season due to the discovery of three wooden statues positioned in a small chapel under this stela. One of these statues takes the form of God Osiris, wearing the Upper Egyptian white crown, what is more the other two statues were of King Horemheb also wearing the white crown except in form of the god Ptah (Fig. 1, 2). The latter two statues deify Horemheb which was revealed in his Saqqara tomb before ascending the throne². However, this deification was repeated in other sites, such as his chapel at Gebel el Silsila³. These statues deserve their own article to be later considered and published in a separate article. The ensues of this season resulted in the discovery of approximately 175 artifacts, mostly dating back to the New Kingdom era. Noteworthy, the one principal discovery of King Horemheb at Saqqara was his tomb before ascending the throne⁴.

2. Dimensions:

Type: Rounded top stela

Material: painted limestone

Condition: broken in pieces

Maximum height: 37 cm

Maximum width: 46 cm

Width: 12 cm

¹ Tabet El-Geesh El-sharkia (TG-E- literally translates the eastern mound of the army) located on the opposite side of Tabet El-Geesh El-gharbia (TG-W - western). It lies between the Excavations of the Cairo University and the Louvre Mission Excavations, where the pyramid of Pepi I stands. Concession for MUST to work at the site began in 2020.

² Martin, G.T., *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb, Commander-in-Chief of Tutankhamûn, I*. London, 1989, pp.72-73.

³ Kucharek, A., Gebel el-Silsila, in *UCLA Encyclopaedia of Egyptology*, 1(1), 2012, (pp. 1-17), p. 5-6.

⁴ Martin, G.T., *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb, Commander-in-Chief of Tutankhamûn, I*. London, 1989.

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Fig.1 The stela of Horemheb.

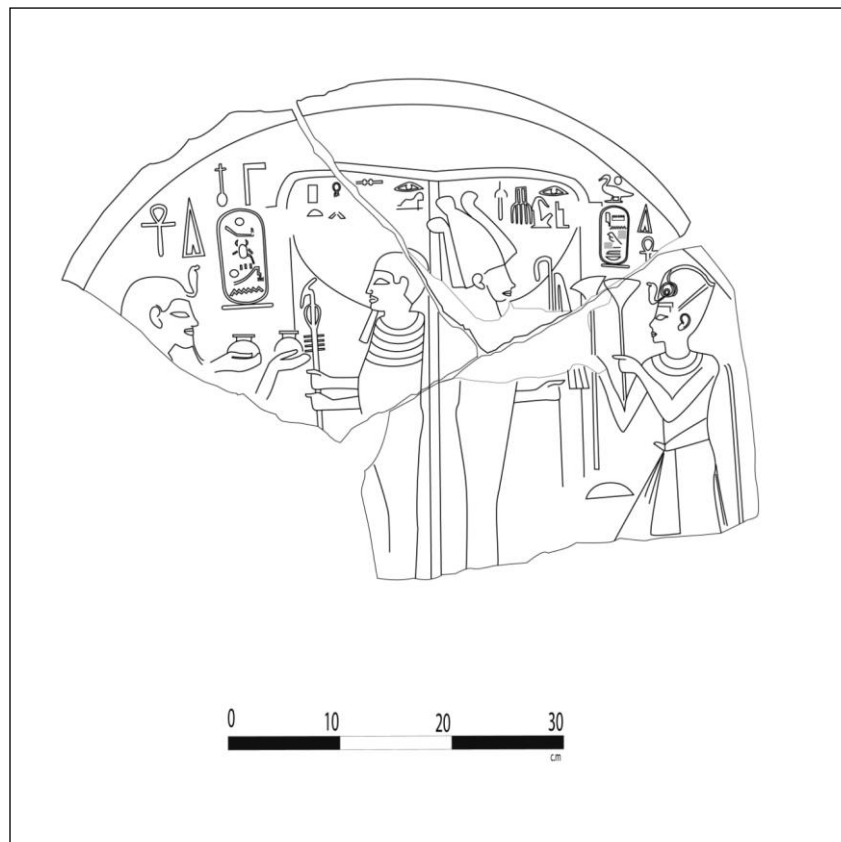


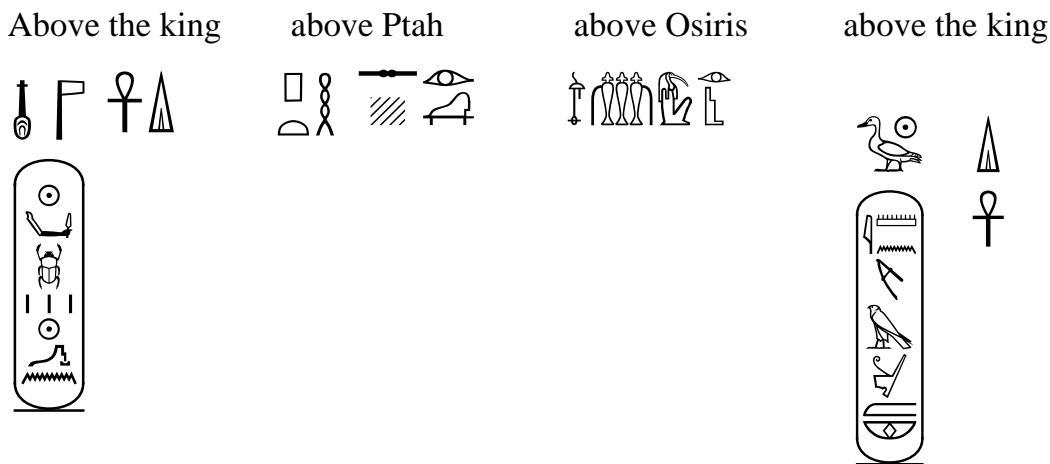
Fig.2 The Facsimile of the Stela

3. Description:

It is a small round top stela, which regrettably was found broken into three pieces, furthermore its lower and left parts remain yet unfound. The stela has a narrow edging of 1cm wide, it was perhaps painted in blue, but the scenes were depicted in reddish brown. The latter mentioned scenes, as well as the inscriptions were carved in sunken reliefs. The mirror image scene has on the right King Horemheb making offerings of papyri flowers to God Osiris, who wears the *atef* crown and holds his traditional *hkb* and *nhh* signs. Nevertheless, it is evident that King Horemheb wears the the blue *hprš*-crown of war. While the left side, king Horemheb wears the royal *nms* headdress and a uraeus on his forehead. Only the king's hands with the *nw*-jars remain because sadly the rest of his body is missing as part of the broken piece. The king offers the two *nw*-jars to God Ptah, who stands in his traditional form holding his composite sceptre of \uparrow *w3s*, \uparrow *εnh* and \uparrow *dd*. The lower part of the king's body is supposed to have the text to help identifying the contents of the *nw*-jars, were they wine or milk, thus the ritual's title remains omitted. However, most probably it was wine since it appears to be more appropriate for the ritual and position.

4. The text

The stela is apportioned between God Osiris and God Ptah permitting some texts next to the scenes on each side, they read as follows:



4.1 On the right side:

4.1.1 Above God Osiris is his name and title read from right to left:



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*Wsir hnty-imnty*⁵.

Osiris chief of the Westerners.

Noteworthy, the text is unclear, why is God Osiris' determinative written with the sign of the god Thoth instead of Osiris? A possible answer is it could be a sign for Osiris' absolute knowledge concerning the netherworld.

4.1.2 Above the king the text reads his name and prayers from read from top to bottom:

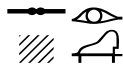


s3 R^c <Hr-m-ḥb-mry-n-Imn> di ʿnh

Son of R^c "Horemheb beloved of Amun"⁶ giving life.

4.2. On the left side:

4.2.1. Above the god is his name from left to right:



pth-Skr-Wsir

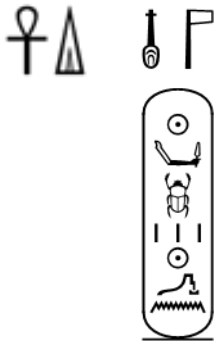
ptah-Sokar-Osiris⁷.

⁵ Wilkinson, Richard H, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, New York, 2003, pp. 119, 187; Wb III, S. 305; Hannig, R., *Großes Handwörterbuch, Ägyptisch-Deutsch*, Mainz am Rhein, 2001, S. 72.

⁶ Willockx, Sjeff, *The cartouche names of the New Kingdom, with complete king list of the 18th, 19th and 20th Dynasty*, Sjeff Willocks, 2008, p. 31; Johnson, Kevin L., *The names of the Kings of Egypt*, Colorado, 2012, p. 46.

⁷ Wb III, S. 487.

4.2. 2. Above the king is his coronation name and some prayers read from right left.



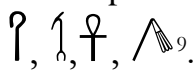
ntr nfr <Dsr-hprw-R^c-stp-n-R^c>) di nḥ.

The god god “*Dsr-hprw-R^c-stp-n-R^c*”⁸.

5- Conclusion

This unique stela of King Horemheb discovered at Saqqara, is the first evidence of its kind in the entire site of Saqqara for Horemheb after he ascended the throne. It is known that Horemheb built a tomb for him in Saqqara when he was the army commander. This stela is foremost evidence that Horemheb did not leave Saqqara infinitely due to the prominence and sanctity of Saqqara as a major cemetery after he went to assume his reign in Thebes.

Worth pointing is King Horemheb wearing the “*hprš*” crown and making offerings of papyri flowers to God Osiris on the right side, while on the left side he was depicted offering *nw*-jars before God “*Ptah-Sokar-Osiris*”, one of the most famous deities in Saqqara. God Sokar was considered one of the gods of the dead, from the name Saqqara is derived from. Perhaps his relationship with God Ptah brought him into contact with the artisans. Memphis was known to be the centre of worship of both gods Sokar and Ptah, as they unified together in Ptah-Sokar.

Intriguingly, Ptah Sokar was united with Osiris to become three deities in one in the human form of a man wearing a woven robe namely Ptah, a falcon head represented as Sokar, and the *atef* crown of God Osiris holding his traditional signs . Thus,

⁸ Willockx, Sjef, *The cartouche names of the New Kingdom*, p. 31; Johnson, Kevin L., *The names of the Kings of Egypt*, p. 46.

⁹ Helck, W. & Otto E., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie, Band III*, Wiesbaden, 1972, 176-177.

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the important deities depicted, and their names inscribed on the stela are gods Ptah, Sokar, Osiris and Osiris-khenty-Imenty (or Osiris chief of the Westerners). The name means "Foremost of the Westerners" or "Chief of the Westerners", where "Westerners" refers to the dead. This name was also used as a title for God Anubis¹⁰.

Ptah – Sokar – Osiris is a unification between the three gods, it was the god of the cemetery of Memphis, especially within the Saqqara necropolis. Originally the god Ptah is believed to be worshipped as a creator god and patron of craftsmen and architects. In the triad of Memphis, he is the husband of Sekhmet and the father of Nefertum. He was also regarded as the father of the sage Imhotep¹¹.

Fascinatingly, the stela has for the first time the determinative of god Osiris written as god Thoth (𓄠) instead of the seated god Osiris (𓄡). Thus, it was symbolizing the absolute knowledge of the netherworld by merging both gods Thoth and Osiris.

We do not have some other Stele for the king Horemheb to make a comparison between them and our present Stela.

¹⁰ Wilkinson, Richard H., *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, 2003, pp. 119, 187.

¹¹ [Allen, James P.](#), *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, Yale Egyptological Study, 1988, pp. 38–41.

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