



## A Private Funerary Stela from the Excavation in Front of Karnak Temples

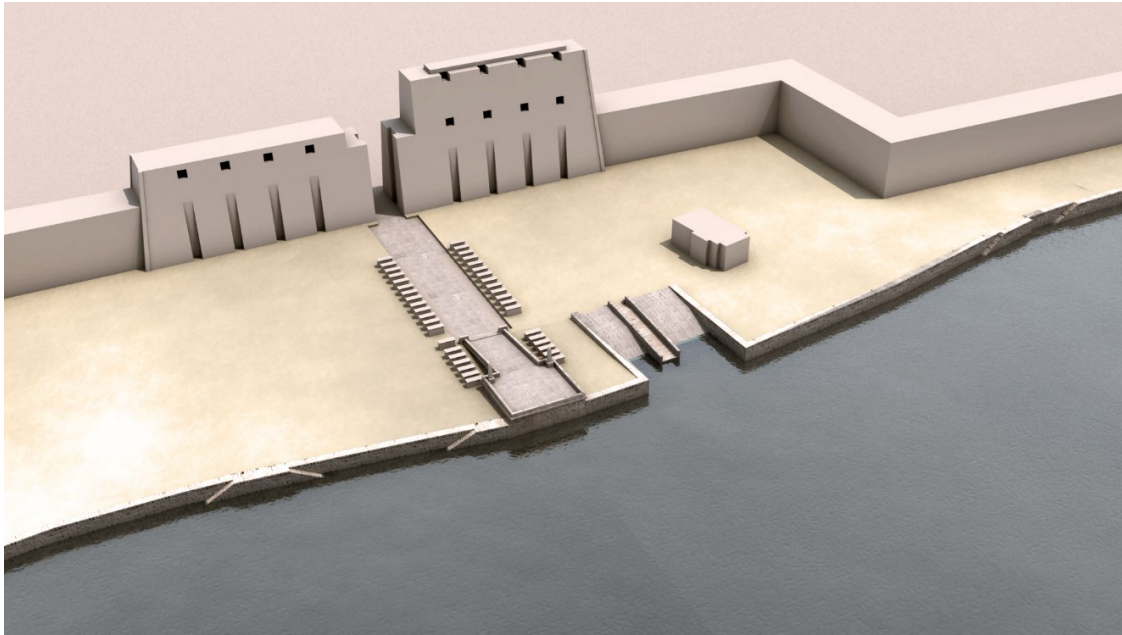
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*This article presents a funerary stela of New Kingdom date from the excavation carried out in front of the temples of Karnak by an Egyptian team directed by the author. Reused in the construction of a Roman Period bath, the stela features two scenes from funerary texts (the Amduat and Book of the Dead).*

I dedicate this paper to Dr. Richard Wilkinson, who is one of the great scholars to work in Luxor. He has always been a great friend and supportive of our work there. Richard's work as the director of the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition and mission at the temple of Tausret in Western Thebes has led to a deeper understanding of the history of that temple and of the reign of Queen Tausret. He has also enriched Egyptological literature with his books and publications, which have engraved his name in the history of Egyptology.

### DESCRIPTION

Excavation in front of Karnak Temples revealed a great embankment of sandstone blocks, built to protect the temples from the danger of the river's annual flood (Figures 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> It also brought to light two quays, the main location being to the south of the temple's tribune, with a secondary one to the north. Work there proved that the embankment does not form part of a basin such as that depicted in the tomb of Neferhotep (TT 49) from the New Kingdom. It may have functioned as a formal quayside in parallel to the stretch of embankment north and south of the first pylon tribune. Several staircases were built into the western face of the embankment, accompanied by many mooring loops (Figure 3) at different levels for embarkation of visitors' boats and ships. The embankment provided important clues as to the history of the river's location and level in ancient times.<sup>2</sup> That the Graeco-Roman structures found during excavations lack any erosion or evidence of flood confirms that the Nile has gradually migrated to the west subsequent to the completion of the embankment, where it remains to this day.



**Figure 1: Artistic impression of Karnak West after the new excavations (all figures courtesy Ministry of State for Antiquities)**



**Figure 2: Artistic impression of the main quay of Karnak**

Among the discoveries from late Roman times is a Roman bath (Figure 4) that was found north of the Ptolemaic bath discovered in 2007. The Roman bath covers 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with many archaeological features having been discovered. Many blocks from the Pharaonic Period were discovered reused in the construction of this bath. Among the finds was the false door of Useramun, vizier during the reign of

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Thutmose III, discovered at the bath's entrance.<sup>3</sup> The Roman bath complex was partially built over late Ptolemaic structures. Many mud-brick rooms were found adjacent to the north of the Roman bath and date this to the late Ptolemaic Period (Figure 8). A limestone stela, described below (Figures 9 and 10), was discovered inside one of the rooms. It was found with its inscribed surface facing down. Pottery and other artifacts found during excavation (Figures 5–7) date the bath to the third century CE and demonstrate the continued importance of the Karnak temples in the Roman Period.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STELA (FIGURES 9 AND 10)

The stela is of white limestone, with the following measurements: height, 51 cm; width, 27 cm; thickness, 10 cm. It is rectangular in shape and was prepared



**Figure 3: The embankment found in front of Karnak**





**Figure 4: The area of the Roman bath**



**Figure 5: Amphoras found in the area of the Roman bath**



**Figure 6: Pottery from the third century CE**

with incised borderlines at both sides and has a rounded top. The stela was cut from a reused block, as it has the remains of a sunk relief on its thickness showing part of two legs of a man wearing a short kilt. The stela itself was carved in three registers divided by two incised lines. The rounded upper part (lunette) is decorated in low sunk relief and depicts the sun god's boat with two oars at the stern. The scene also has two baboons praising the sun disk. According to Egyptian myth, the sun god in his barque knows his way through the darkness of night to his own rebirth in the morning, having done so since the beginning of time. This depiction represents the first hour of the Amduat.<sup>4</sup>

The first register has decoration and text relief with internal details. It shows the owner of the stela, wearing a long kilt, facing right as he burns incense, while behind him is another person, maybe his son, but unfortunately this part of the stela is badly damaged. In front of them, the god Osiris sits on his throne and holds with his left hand a *heka* scepter. Behind Osiris stands the goddess Maat; her right hand is missing but her left grasps an *ankh* symbol. She is followed by the god Anubis,

who holds the *was* scepter with the right hand and *ankh* symbol with the left. Above this register is a text in a condition too bad to decipher entirely:

*Wsr nb nhḥ // // wrt Inpw*

The second register has a scene of six figures facing right, in an adoring position. The figures are two men and four women who most likely represent the family of the deceased. In front of the figures is a stand holding incense. The first man on the right raises his hands in adoration. He has a shaved head and is wearing a long kilt. He is followed by a second man, wearing the same kind of kilt. This man raises his right hand in adoration and holds a lotus flower in his left hand. The four women behind them wear long garments that cover their shoulders. They raise their right hands in adoration and hold lotus flowers in their left ones. The second woman wears a perfume cone on her head. The figures are mentioned by their names. Most likely they are offering in the presence of the deceased. The text above the figures is hard to read because it is just scratched into the stone and is preserved in a bad condition.



**Figure 7: Roman Period coins**





**Figure 8: The Ptolemaic bath with embankment**

The third register depicts the following (from right to left): two trees, from the second of which the goddess Nut appears, holding in her right hand a *hes* vase with purification water flowing toward four women. The first three women are represented kneeling, and the fourth at the end is standing. The lower part of this register is missing. The text above this scene is also damaged but has been deciphered as the following:

(above the two trees)  
*Nwt mis///// ntrw nbt t3wy*

(above the four women)

*dd mdw in Wsr///// nbt pr ti3 b3kt R<sup>c</sup>*

(above the first woman)

*tw///*

This scene is chapter 57 of Book of the Dead, and it can be seen on the walls of many tombs in Western Thebes.

#### DATE

The style of the stela and its design roughly indicate a New Kingdom date, evidenced by the clothes and religious scene. In addition, the workmanship is very poor, indicating the possibility of a late Ramesside Period date. During the Roman Period, the stela was relocated from the western Thebes to be used in the structures in front of Karnak temple.

#### CONCLUSION

Our excavation in front of the temples at Karnak has shed an important new light on the strategies used by the ancient Egyptians to protect one of the most important temples in history. The excavations have also presented new ideas about the west section from the embankment wall to the temple's first pylon and have revealed many archaeological remains from the Dynastic Period to the Byzantine Period.



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**Figure 9: Photograph of the Ramesside stela**



**Figure 10: Epigraphic drawing of the Ramesside stela**

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to give thanks those who shared in this excavation: Salah EL-Masekh and Warda El-Nagar, and also to Ibrahim Soliman, director of Karnak Temples.
- <sup>2</sup> Mansour Boraik, "Excavation of the Quay and Embankment in front of Karnak Temples: Preliminary Report," *CdK* 13 (2010): 79–100.
- <sup>3</sup> Mansour Boraik, "A Granite False Door of Useramun," *Memnonia Cahier Supplémentaire* 2 (2010): 181–191.
- <sup>4</sup> Theodor Abt and Erik Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife: The Egyptian Amduat—A Quest for Immortality* (Zurich: Daimon Verlag, 2003), 24–27.



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THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS  
AND ANCIENT THEBES**

**Papers Presented in Honor of  
Richard H. Wilkinson**

**Edited by Pearce Paul Creasman**

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