STELE OF AMENHOTEP II (Amenophis II) MAKING AN OFFERING TO AMUN-RE

(Translated from the French May 2020 revised edition)

Provenance unknown
Quartzite
H. 33 cm, w. 39.8 cm; average thickness: 6.8 cm
Private collection
Bibliography.
PM VIII 803-044-700.
A. KLUG, *Königliche Stelen in der Zeit von Ahmose bis Amenophis III*, Turnhout 2002 (*Monumenta Aegyptiaca 8*) p. 293

Even though only the upper part of this stele remains, we can estimate its original height to be about 80 cm (1-Photo H. Dubois). The carved scene on the lunette is divided in two equal parts, along a median axis defined by a dividing line between the two groups of hieroglyphic signs. On the right side, King Amenhotep II wears the Blue Crown (*Khepresh*) surmounted by a *uraeus*, his neck is adorned with a *usekh* necklace, and he is holding a pair of globular offering vases. His titulature is displayed above his figure on three columns: *the perfect god, master of rites, Aâkheperourê, endowed with life forever*. Standing on the left side, the god Amun is dressed in his usual corselet with suspenders, holding in his left hand a was scepter, and wearing his traditional tall Double Feathers Crown headdress. Above the god, two columns of hieroglyphic signs, oriented in a retrograde manner, summarize the benefits granted by Amun in exchange for the royal offering: *Amun-Re king of the gods, may he give life, stability and prosperity*. A fragmentary bouquet is still visible at the edge of the break indicating that there was an offering table between the king and the god. Finally the lunette is surmounted by a large winged solar disk. The bottom of the stele, which is now lost, bore the royal titulature and probably mentioned the temple for which the monument was intended, perhaps the Funerary Temple of the king on the left bank of the Nile, at Thebes.

The stele is made of silicified sandstone or quartzite, a hard material composed essentially of silica, in the form of quartz (SiO2: 92.5%), and some iron oxide (FeO: 4.1%), which is responsible for the beige-brown color of the rock. Egyptian quartzite is formed by the impregnation and induration of sand under the action of hydrothermal fluids rich in silica, and not by recrystallization of the sand due to high pressure and temperature (metamorphism). This difference between the formation processes explains the presence of coarser elements (gravels or pebbles) frequently found in Egyptian quartzite. The other components of the rock - besides silica (quartz) and iron oxide - are silicates (feldspar, for example) or hard minerals, naturally present in the sand before induration (apatite, rutile, etc.).

This type of material is found in two locations in Egypt: the Djebel Ahmar, in the eastern suburbs of Cairo, and the Tingar and Goulab Djebels, in the western desert near Aswan[1]. It is possible to distinguish between the rocks of the two provenances by a combination of petrographic and geochemical[2] analyses, which was not carried out here.

Quartzite was frequently used in architecture and colossal statuary, but rarely in the manufacture of stelae. Quartzite stelae are generally monumental works and / or bear important royal messages (for example on the Middle Kingdom border stele of Semna[3] in Berlin). In the New Kingdom, the colossal stelae in the funerary

[1] KLEMM, R., KLEMM, D.D., 1993. *Steine und Steinbrüche im Alten Ägypten*. Berlin, Heidelberg.
[2] DE PUTTER, Th., 1991. « L'identification et l'origine du matériau de la statue du dieu-faucon des Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire ». *Bulletin des Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire*, 62, 47-52.
[3] Inv.-Nr. ÄM 1157 (règne de Sésostris III ; hauteur 1,60 m) : *Soudan. Royaumes sur le Nil*, Paris, Institut du Monde arabe, 1997, 78-79, n° 81.

temple of Amenhotep III[4] are part of this tradition of large-scale royal documents. Stelae in this material for non-royal people are relatively rare (except for example for Amenemhat[5] in Berlin, or Amenmose[6] in London). Because quartzite is a hard material that requires skilled craftsmanship, it is likely that the works offered by kings to private people came from royal workshops and are marks of favor towards their owner[7].

A computed non-destructive tomography scan was performed on this stele. This imaging technique provides a three-dimensional view of the interior of the stele using multiple successive "slices". As mentioned above, the tomography reveals for example, in the body of the piece, the presence of small pebbles and gravel. But tomography also allows us to measure with great precision the depth of individual hieroglyphic signs. On this stele, the deepest signs reach 8 mm, but depths vary significantly.

Indeed, the stele shows clear indications that it has been altered and recarved several times in antiquity. As with many other documents, the figure of Amun was hammered and erased during the reign of Akhenaten, and then re-engraved when Egypt returned to religious orthodoxy, probably in the early 19th Dynasty. Stylistically, we immediately notice differences in the portraits of Amenhotep II and Amun-Re in the representation of the eyes, eyebrows and mouth. Amenhotep II is shown with a long nose, a small mouth, his eyes outlined by deep contours with slightly arched eyebrows and a small double chin while Amun-Re has a small nose, more almond-shaped eyes, eyebrows that are almost horizontal and no double chin. A tomography scan revealed the presence, around the god, of a network of oblique herringbone pattern marks testifying to this phase of erasures and recarvings (2-image modified by L. Viola, from an original tomography N°07 provided by Perrault Laboratory, copyright LV). The scan and other examinations also revealed the presence of a number of traces and markings indicating that some inscribed hieroglyphic signs in the inscriptions and parts of the images of the king and the god were modified. The outline of the cartouche of Amenhotep II has been altered several times (3-image modified by L. Viola, from an original RIR - reflective infrared - provided by Art Analysis Laboratory, copyright L.V., and 3A, outlined in red). An examination of the cartouche under ultraviolet light reveals new information which was not seen in the reflective infrared radiation test or in natural light. A new sign, a small ankh, appears in front of and slightly below the visible Re sign (4- image modified by L. Viola, from an original UV - ultraviolet radiation - provided by Art Analysis Laboratory, copyright L.V., and 4A- outlined in red). On the same UV radiation image, the scarab in the cartouche has been modified to show parts of the silhouette of the goddess Maat with her head emerging from the scarab's front paws. The modification of the Kheper (scarab) / Maat signs is very similar to the change that was made on the cartouche of the sarcophagus of Queen Hatshepsut at the Boston Museum (4B). Traces of missing profiles have also been revealed, for instance a small and incomplete royal portrait profile set in front of and above the face of Amenhotep II (5- modified by L. Viola, from an original RTI-PTM image produced by Art Analysis, copyright, L.V., and 5A outlined in red). The identities of these portraits have not yet been discovered. However, it seems that the stone has kept the memory of other royal profiles that were later erased. These erased and reworked traces, although very fragmentary, suggest that the composition of the scene has been updated several times.

A number of royal quartzite monuments show similar traces of alterations. A stele of Thutmosis III[8] which came from his funerary temple was later modified during the Amarna Period and then restored under Sety I.

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[4] KLUG, A., 2002. *Königliche Stelen in der Zeit von Ahmose bis Amenophis III*, Turnhout (*Monumenta Aegyptiaca* 8), 376-390.

[5] Inv.-Nr. ÄM 1638 (règne de Thoutmosis III ; hauteur 0,62 m).

[6] BM EA1843 (règne de Thoutmosis IV ; hauteur 0,39 m).

[7] Similary, CONNOR, S., TAVIER, H., DE PUTTER, Th., 2015." 'Put the statues in the oven': preliminary results of research on steatite sculpture from the late Middle Kingdom". *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 101, 311-337.
DELVAUX, L., 2000. Des statues nombreuses en toutes pierres dures – les sculpteurs, leurs matériaux et leurs clients au début du Nouvel Empire. In C. KARLSHAUSEN, Th. DE PUTTER (eds). *Pierres égyptiennes, chefs d'œuvre pour l'Éternité*, Mons, 85-93.

[8] Le Caire CGC 34015 (hauteur conservée 0,53 m) : KLUG, op. cit., 147-148, Abb. 13.

Also, the sarcophagus of Queen Hatshepsut[9] that was altered for the re-burial of her father Thutmosis I bears inscriptions that were partially recontituted and filled in antiquity with a composite material to simulate the color and texture of the quartzite stone[10]. The ongoing research on the Amenhotep II stele confirms that the ancient Egyptians never hesitated to recarve, on special occasions, important monuments, rather than to create new ones from scratch, especially when the material used was particularly expensive and associated with the most prestigious royal achievements.

Luc Delvaux / Thierry De Putter / Christian Orsenigo / Lucien Viola

1

2

3

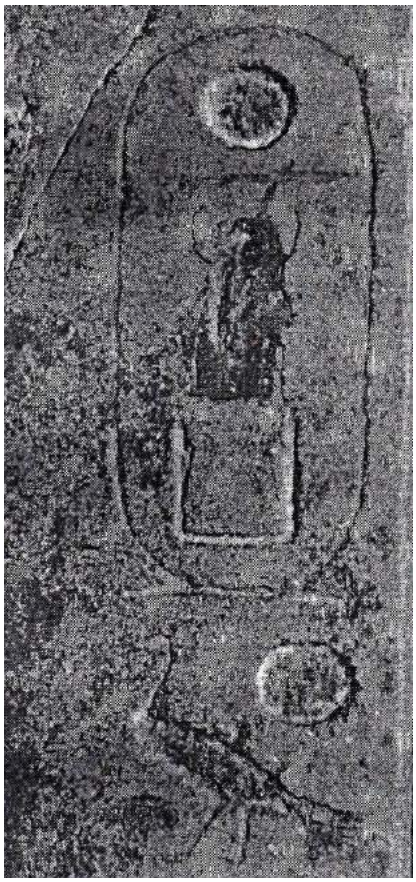
3A

[9] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 04.278.1: DER MANUELIAN, P. & LOEBEN, C. 1993. "New Light on the Recarved Sarcophagus of Hatshepsut and Thutmose I in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79, 121-155.

[10] NEWMAN, R. 1993. « Analysis of Red Paint and Filling Material from the Sarcophagus of Queen Hatshepsut and King Thutmose I", *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston* 5, 62-65.

4

4A



4B

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5A