



Mansoura University  
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# GOLDEN FACES: A GILDED RELIEF FROM THE TIME OF RAMSES II

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## الملخص

وجدت اللوحة محل البحث في منطقة أبيدوس منذ 150 عاماً، وهي حالياً تنتمي إلى مجموعة المتحف المصري بالقاهرة. وتتمتع اللوحة بنقوش ذات مستوى فني رفيع وفي حالة ممتازة، كما أنها تحتفظ ببقايا ورق الذهب والذي لا يزال ظاهراً على أوجه المعبودات المصورة على اللوحة. وكان جمال اللوحة سبباً في اختيارها أكثر من مرة ضمن قطع المعارض الدولية خارج مصر، فهي حالياً في جولة في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية حيث تعرض في متحف العلوم الطبيعية ضمن معرض "رئيس الأكبر وذهب الفراشة"، كما كانت القطعة مصاحبة لمعرض "إيزيس، الإلهة المصرية التي غزت روما" والذي نظم في إيطاليا في عام 1998. وتحمل اللوحة خرطوش الملك رمسيس الثاني، بالإضافة إلى صور المعبودات إيزيس وأوزوريس وأنوبيس، كما أن اللوحة تشتمل على ألقاب أحد كبار رجال الدولة والتي تتضمن لقب الكاتب وألقاب كهنوتية مرتبطة بطفوس الملك، ونرجح أن هذه اللوحة كانت جزءاً من مقبرة أو مقصورة لأحد النبلاء المقربين من الملك رمسيس الثاني.

A gilded block found at Abydos 150 years ago, currently belongs to the collection of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The remarkable quality of the carvings on the block and the remains of gold leaf still visible on the faces of the divinities was a decisive factor for making the block a favorable choice for international exhibitions. The block is today on tour to the United States titled "Ramses the Great and the Gold of The Pharaohs", currently at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. This is not the first tour for the fragment as it traveled in 1998 to Italy on a tour called "Isis, the Egyptian goddess who conquered Rome". The block carries the cartouche of King Ramses II as well as figures of Isis, Osiris, and Anubis. Additionally, it carries titles of a high ranking noble whose name is unfortunately

missing. The inscribed titles reflect the position of its owner as a scribe and a priest whose duties are strongly related to the king. The block likely once belonged to a tomb or chapel related to a top elite member of the royal entourage.

**Key words**

Abydos; Ramses II; Gilded; Osiris; *Sm*-Priest; Lector-Priest

**Introduction**

The site of Abydos had a distinguished religious and funerary importance since the early Dynastic times. The god Osiris was established as the patron deity of Abydos by the end of the Old Kingdom when he merged with the local Abydene divinity Khenti-Imenty whose name became a title of Osiris.<sup>1</sup> During the New Kingdom, the site continued to prosper with the building of Temples of Millions of Years for several kings, including those of Ramses II who built two temples near the North Abydos Necropolis.<sup>2</sup>

The block here discussed carries the museum entry number JE 21802 – SR 4/13727 and it is recorded in the Museum's

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<sup>1</sup> D. O'Connor, "Abydos", *Expedition* (1969), 30, 31.

<sup>2</sup> K. M. Cahail, *In the Shadow of Osiris: Non-Royal Mortuary Landscapes at South Abydos During the Late Middle and New Kingdoms*, PhD dissertation of Pennsylvania University (Pennsylvania, 2014), 342-3, in:

[http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1222?utm\\_source=repository.upenn.edu%2Fedissertations%2F1222&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1222?utm_source=repository.upenn.edu%2Fedissertations%2F1222&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages) (accessed on 9 April 2022).

registers with provenance as Abydos and discovery date in April 1872 without further specification of the exact location of the find. Although the date corresponds to the time of August Mariette's work at Abydos between the sixties and the eighties of the Nineteenth Century, no mention of it is to be found in his publications or any other publications of the site.<sup>3</sup> Mariette, who was occupied with simultaneous digs in other Egyptian sites, left a considerable portion of his work unpublished and undocumented.<sup>4</sup> The block is also not mentioned in Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography*,<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Kitchen, *Rameside Inscriptions*,<sup>6</sup> or in any other study of the time of Ramses II.

The present study aims at publishing this intriguing fragment, attempting to propose the original purpose for which it was used, as well as narrowing the prospect of its probable owner.

<sup>3</sup> A. Mariette, *Abydos: Description des Fouilles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1869-1880); A. Mariette, *Catalogue général des monuments d'Abydos découverts pendant les fouilles de cette ville* (Paris, 1880).

<sup>4</sup> O'Connor, "Abydos", 30.

<sup>5</sup> B. Porter, and R. L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings*, VI, Upper Egypt: Chief Temples (Excluding Thebes) (Oxford, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> K. Kitchen, *Rameside Inscriptions*, Vols. II-III (Oxford, 1979-1980).



Fig. 1 Fragment JE 21802–SR 4/13727  
Drawing by Iman Elsaid



Fig. 2 Front side of fragment JE 21802-SR 4/13727  
Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen courtesy of EMC

**Description**

Height: 55 cm.

Width: 42 cm.

The fragment here studied contains the remainder of two scenes separated by a column of hieroglyphic text. The text is surmounted by a sun-disc flanked by two cobras to the left and right, wearing the crowns of Upper Egypt and of Lower Egypt respectively. In the space between the two

cobras and under the sun-disc is found the epithet  *Pḥdty* used as an epithet for Horus embodied in the sun-disc. Underneath this text follows a vertical long cartouche that contains both the *nsw-bity* and the *s3-Re* names of the king. Similar long cartouches were found on other monuments of the king<sup>7</sup> (Figs. 1-2).

The scene to the right of the text shows the god Anubis standing facing right while performing a ritual that is lost with the missing part of the block. The scene to the left is relatively more complete, as it shows the god Osiris standing facing left while holding his *nh3h3* and *hk3* scepters and wearing the Atef crown with two cobras hanging from the horns. The god is followed by his wife Isis who is putting her arms around the upper body of her husband. Remains of a broken *pt* sky sign stretch over the two parts of the scene. The faces and necks of the three divinities are gilded as well as the hands of Osiris. The wigs of the gods still maintain their vivid black color, but otherwise remains of colors are faint on the other details. The upper edge of the block is rough and seems undressed (fig. 3) while the lower edge is well finished and has inscriptions with titles of a private individual (Figs. 4-5). Remains of carvings and colors are still visible on the back of the block (Fig. 6).

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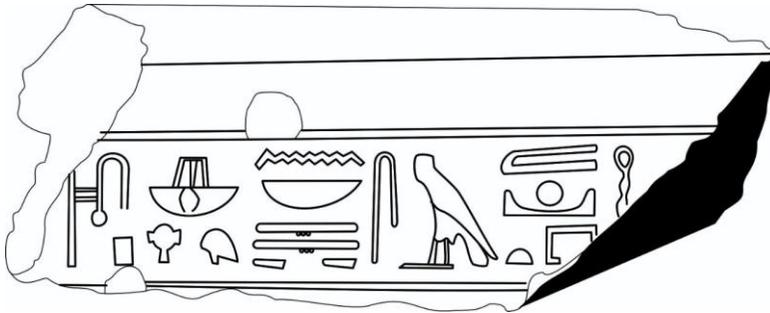
<sup>7</sup> S. Iskander, and O. Goelet, *The Temple of Ramesses II in Abydos*, Volume 1/1, Wall Scenes (2015), Pl. 2.4.8-9, 3.1.43-44; A. A. Selim, “The Inscriptions of the Second Pylon of Ramses II at Abydos”, *JGUAA2* (2021), 14.

The carvings are all done in sunk relief, a favored type of relief for ancient Egyptian temple exteriors. Moreover, this is the style that Ramses II employed almost exclusively for most of his reign since at least his second reginal year.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 3 Undressed upper side of fragment JE 21802–SR  
4/13727

Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen courtesy of EMC



<sup>8</sup> P. J. Brand, *Monuments of Sety I: Epigraphical, Historical, and Art Historical Analysis* (Leiden, 2000), 28-9.

Fig. 4 Lower side of fragment JE 21802–SR 4/13727  
Drawing by Iman Elsaid



Fig. 5 Lower side of fragment JE 21802–SR 4/13727  
Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen courtesy of EMC



Fig. 6 The back of fragment JE 21802–SR 4/13727  
showing remains of carvings and colours  
Photo by Sameh Abdel-Mohsen courtesy of EMC

### Inscriptions

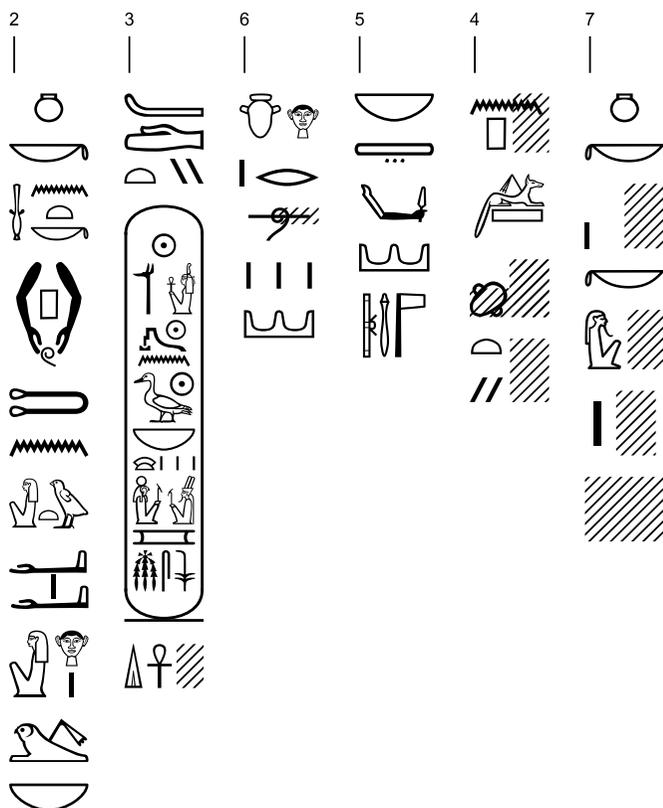
Text on the front of the block:

Line 1:



*Ist wrt mwt ntr*

Translation: Isis the great, mother of the god



Line 2:

*ink snt.k ḥṗt.n.i tw ḥwy.i ḥr šnbt nb*

Translation: I am your sister, I embrace you, my two arms over all the breast (the whole breast).

Line 3:

*Phdty Wsr-M33t-r<sup>c</sup>-stp-n-r<sup>c</sup> s3-R<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>w R<sup>c</sup>-ms-sw-mry-Imn  
di<sup>c</sup> n<sup>h</sup> ///*

Translation: User-Maat-Re-setep-en-Re Son of Re, Lord of Appearances,<sup>9</sup> Re-mes-su-mry-Imn, given life

Line 4:

*Inpw ///// [imy-wt]? ///*

Translation: Anubis ///// [who is in the embalming tent?]

Line 5:

*nb t3 dsr ntr<sup>c</sup>3*

Translation: Lord of the sacred land (Abydos)

Line 6:

*hr-ib r3-st3w*

Translation: In the heart of (inside) Rosteau.

Line 7:

*ink ///.k /////*

Translation: I am /////, your /////

Text on the lower side of the block:

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes translated “Lord of Crowns”, See: *KRI* II, 587; Selim, “The Inscriptions of the Second Pylon”, 14.



- In Line 4, the damaged sign upon which resides Anubis, does not match the sign E16 of Anubis on a shrine. The god is most likely seated on sign N37  that often interchanges with N36 .<sup>14</sup> We therefore proposed the writing  that was intended instead of , used for the writing of Anubis on other monuments of the time of Ramses II.<sup>15</sup>
- Also in Line 4, we suggested for the broken text the use of the title of Anubis *Inpw imy-wt*, Anubis, who is in the embalming tent, due to the broken sign that we believe is the sign Aa2 .<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford, 1979), 491.

<sup>15</sup> H. Gauthier, *Le Temple de Ouadi Es-Seboua*, I (Cairo, 1912), 164; Ch. Leitz, *Lexikon der Ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, I (Leuven, 2002), 390.

<sup>16</sup> *Wb* I, 73.14; *LGG* I, 232-234; also see examples on the Eighteenth Dynasty statue of the chief workman Hor MMA 23.8, and on fragments of a statue of the chief workman Sety, see B. Van De Walle, “La statue-bloc du “Directeur des Travaux” Hor (MMA, Ny, 23.8)” (1971), 135, fig. 2, and Pl. XI; W. Helck, *Historisch-biographische Texte der 2. Zwischenzeit und neue Texte der 18. Dynastie Nachträ* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 56, doc. 35 and 59, doc. 36; *LGG* I, 391, 63-4, also found on the Ramesside stela (GEM 9295), M. Kafafy, “Two Ramesside Stelae at the Grand Egyptian Museum (Gem 9295 & 9444)”, *SHEDET* 8 (2021), 39. *imy-wt* is also the name of the Anubis fetish used as an emblem of resurrection, see: *Wb* I, 73.15; T. Handoussa, “A Newly Found Tomb-Stela from the Ramesside Period in Saqqara”, in: *Hommages à François Daumas* (Monpellier, 1986), 412. There is a faint chance that the broken sign was G12 , in this case the writing of the name of Anubis is read *Inpwt*. However, we do find this option to be very

- In Line 8, we suggested the title *sm m 3ht nḥh*, the *Sm*-priest in the Horizon of Eternity. based on the broken hieroglyphs and on the existence of this title during the time of Ramses II among the titles of one the High Priests of Re at Heliopolis,<sup>17</sup> as shall be further discussed below.

### Discussion and analysis

The fragment still bears remains of gold leaf in a good state of preservation clearly observable on the bodies of the divinities, particularly on their faces, necks, the upper chest of Isis, as well as on the hands of Osiris. This fits with the belief that the flesh of the gods was of gold.<sup>18</sup> Examples of the use of gold in reliefs are found in other monuments, demonstrating how the ancient Egyptians gilded doors, columns and obelisks.<sup>19</sup> In addition, reliefs that were

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unlikely as in similar cases it precedes the Anubis determinative, see  
*LGG I*, 398.

<sup>17</sup> D. Raue, *Heliopolis und das Haus des Re*” (Berlin, 1999), 78, n.8, 202; Ch. Raedler, “Prestige, Role, and Performance: Ramesside High Priests of Memphis”, in Rolf Gundlach and Kate Spence, (eds), *Sonderdruck aus 5. Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie 5<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Egyptian Royal Ideology: Palace and Temple Architecture – Decoration – Ritual in Cambridge, July, 16th-17th, 2007* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 146.

<sup>18</sup> E. Teeter, “The Body in Ancient Egyptian Texts and Representations”, *BASP* Vol. 37, No. 1/4 (2000), 155.

<sup>19</sup> P. Lacau, “l’or dans l’architecture Égyptienne”, *ASAE* LIII/2 (1955), 221.

covered with gold sheet or gold leaf are recorded.<sup>20</sup> The examples include gilded images of the barge of Amun found in the Great Hypostyle Hall,<sup>21</sup> and on the Third Pylon of Karnak temple,<sup>22</sup> and images of divinities.<sup>23</sup> Gold leaf was also used, evidently less frequently, in private monuments. In the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Nebamun, now at the British Museum (BM EA37977), remains of gold leaf are a good prove that it was applied in the tombs of the nobles.

The name of the king contains the long version of the nsw-bity name of the king user-Maat-Re-step-en-Re, which he adopted after the death of his father and the end of their brief co-regency in his second regnal year.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the *s3-R<sup>c</sup>* name of the king is written in the later version *R<sup>c</sup>-ms-sw* that is first attested in year eight of the king's reign<sup>25</sup> then adopted solely around the king's twentieth or twenty-first year to replace the earlier *R<sup>c</sup>-ms-s*.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the

<sup>20</sup> Lacau, "l'or dans l'architecture Égyptienne", 247.

<sup>21</sup> P. J. Brand, R. Feleg, and W. J. Murnane, *The Great Hypostyle Hall in the Temple of Amun at Karnak*, Part 1/2 Translation and Commentary, OIP 142 (Chicago, 2018), 207.

<sup>22</sup> PM II, 80; Brand, et al., *Hypostyle Hall of Karnak*, 1/2, 207, n. 448.

<sup>23</sup> Lacau, "l'or dans l'architecture Égyptienne", 247-9.

<sup>24</sup> W. J. Murnane, "The Earlier Reign of Ramesses II and His Coregency with Sety I", *JNES*, Vol. 34 (1975), No. 3, 184; A. Spalinger, "Early Writings of the Name of Ramses II", *CdE* 83 (2008), 78-9.

<sup>25</sup> A. Spalinger, "Historical Observations on the Military Reliefs of Abu Simbel and Other Ramesside Temples in Nubia" *JEA* 66 (1980), 96.

<sup>26</sup> Brand, *Monuments of Sety I*, 36, 38; Spalinger, "Historical Observations", 96, 98.

writing of the prenomen is done according to the later phase of writing the name of the pharaoh.<sup>27</sup> However, the nomen of the king is written in what Antony Spalinger calls ‘post middle phase, where the *-sw* is used but the deities Re and Amun are still represented in figures and not spelled out.’<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the block could be dated after year 8 since the writing of the king’s nomen as *R<sup>c</sup>-ms-sw* and before year 20 to fit with Spalinger ‘post middle phase mentioned above.

The titles on the block included that of *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp n nb t3wy* of the chief lector priest of the king. In order to have a better understanding of the status of the man who held it, we explored the title *hrj-ḥbt*.

The title *hrj-ḥbt*, usually translated as a lector-priest, or ‘he who carries (lit. is under) the ritual book’,<sup>29</sup> is held by the only full-time priest who conducted the service at the funerary<sup>30</sup> or solar temples.<sup>31</sup> The title was in several cases connected with the service of certain gods, specific temples, the king or his palace.<sup>32</sup> The job also involved magico-

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<sup>27</sup> A. Spalinger, *Five Views on Egypt*, *Lingua Aegyptia, Studia monographica* 6 (Göttingen, 2006), 139.

<sup>28</sup> Spalinger, *Five Views*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> A. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* (London, 1947), I, 55.

<sup>30</sup> H. De Meulenaere, “Priester”, *LÄ* IV, (1982), 1087; R. Forshaw, *The Role of the Lector (hrj-ḥbt) in Ancient Egyptian Society*, A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Life Sciences (Manchester, 2013), 231-71.

<sup>31</sup> De Meulenaere, “Priester”, 1087.

<sup>32</sup> Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 69-77.

medical practices related to healing.<sup>33</sup> It was sometimes considered as an honorary title, and was occasionally held by kings and gods.<sup>34</sup> A more modern view of the title *hrj-hbt* suggest that it was not a priestly title in the same capacity as other priestly titles, but rather involved professional ritualistic functions performed in diverse domains.<sup>35</sup> For instance, the *hrj-hbt* of a king seem to have been responsible for ritual practices in the throne room, in addition to his role in the *sed*-feast of the king<sup>36</sup> and would accordingly make a close confidant of the king.

Similarly, the title *hrj-hbt hrj-tp*, translated as the Chief lector priest, is a full time job that required that the priest did not follow the rotation system followed by other priestly ranks that enabled them to work part-time at the temple and part-time in other secular professions outside the temple.<sup>37</sup> The holder of the title *hrj-hbt hrj-tp* was the second highest paid of priests in the temple after the High Priest,<sup>38</sup> a benefit that certainly reflects the high status of the job. In addition to being responsible for recitation of texts and prayers in the temple,<sup>39</sup> the *hrj-hbt hrj-tp* announced the verdicts of the oracles that happened during

<sup>33</sup> D. M. Doxey, "Priesthood", in D. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69; Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 40, 291-309.

<sup>34</sup> Mariette, *Abydos* I, Pl. 43; E. Otto, "Cheriheb", *LÄ* I (1975), 941-2.

<sup>35</sup> Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 193, 198-221.

<sup>37</sup> De Meulenaere, "Priester", 1088.

<sup>38</sup> Doxey, "Priesthood", 72.

<sup>39</sup> Doxey, "Priesthood", 72.

festivals and played a crucial role in the rituals of the *sed*-feast of the king.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore expected that the *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp* held other important titles.<sup>41</sup> However, although it appeared as early as the Second Dynasty,<sup>42</sup> it must be noted that the title *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp* is a relatively infrequent title to be found.<sup>43</sup>

Regarding the owner of the block, whose name is unfortunately missing, the block carries several indications of his high status. This is apparent in the titles that he held. In addition to his title *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp n nb t3wy* of the chief lector priest of the king, he also held the title of a *Sm*-priest, two titles held by the top royal officials during the time of Ramses II.<sup>44</sup> These two titles are usually held together by provincial princes and reflected their role as representatives of the king in their province.<sup>45</sup> The position of the *sm*-priest was associated with the cults of Abydos,<sup>46</sup> Heliopolis, and Memphis,<sup>47</sup> as well as the cult of a variety of gods.<sup>48</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup> A. Al-Ayedi, *Index of Egyptian Administrative, Religious and Military Titles of the New Kingdom* (Ismailia, 2006), 503, and n. 4295; Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 201-8.

<sup>41</sup> Raue, *Heliopolis*, 192.

<sup>42</sup> Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Otto, “Cheriheb”, 941; it is found more on Graeco-Roman monuments. See Ch. Leitz, *Lexikon der Ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, VI (Leuven, 2002), 38.

<sup>44</sup> W. C. Hayes, *The Sceptre of Egypt*, II (New York, 1968), 350.

<sup>45</sup> Gardiner, *AEO*, 41, 56.

<sup>46</sup> B. Schmitz, “Sem(priester)”, *LÄ V* (1984), 834.

<sup>47</sup> Gardiner, *AEO*, 40; A. M. Gnirs, “Coping with the Army: The Military and the State in the New Kingdom”, in J. Garcia, C., *Ancient Egyptian Administration* (Boston, 2013), 644-5.

functions of the *Sm*-priest includes that he himself performs the important rite of Opening of the Mouth on the god's image,<sup>49</sup> beside other activities related to the clothing and adorning the god as well as functions related to the *sed*-festivals of the king.<sup>50</sup> Such duties and positions were held by the top elite nobles,<sup>51</sup> including the royal princes.<sup>52</sup>

The *Sm*-priest title used on this fragment is apparently that of *sm m 3ht [nt] nhh*, the *Sm*-Priest at the Horizon of Eternity. This is rare high title that was held by the High Priest of Heliopolis Prince Meryatum, the son of Ramses II and Nefertary<sup>53</sup> and the only dignitary to carry this title during the time of Ramses II that we know of.

However, as we further examined the texts related to the expression *3ht nhh*, we realized that it is a figurative term for temple, palace, tomb, or necropolis.<sup>54</sup> Examples of its use as a name for a temple, are found in the Temple of Sety

<sup>48</sup> LGG VI, 306-7.

<sup>49</sup> KRI, II, 578, Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 273-290.

<sup>50</sup> Gardiner, *AEO*, 39-40; Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 198.

<sup>51</sup> Gnirs, "Coping with the Army", 645.

<sup>52</sup> M. M. Fisher, *The Sons of Ramses II*, Vol. I, Texts and Plates, (Wiesbaden, 2001), 66, 89, 101, 117.

<sup>53</sup> Statue 7347 Berlin: G. Roeder, *Aegyptische Inschriften aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*, II, (Leipzig, 1924), 49; KRI, II, 591, Doc. 369 §906:10; Fisher, *The Sons of Ramses II*, I, 117; Raedler, "Prestige, Role, and Performance", 146.

<sup>54</sup> A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache* (Berlin, 1926), I, 17.19-22;

<https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/BwlBrowser?lcd=Ax.t&tcd=&scd=&pn0=1&etr=0&db=0&f=0&l=0&off=0&bc.x=73&bc.y=9&csz=15>

(accessed on 31.3.2022).

I in Abydos as one of the names used to refer to the temple being dedicated to Osiris,<sup>55</sup> and similarly used to refer to the temple of Amon-Re in TT 18 dated to the Twentieth Dynasty.<sup>56</sup> Its use to indicate a tomb is found in the Great Harris Papyrus,<sup>57</sup> and as a name for the Necropolis, in TT 108 in a scribe's title *sš m 3ht nhh*, scribe in the Horizon of Eternity.<sup>58</sup>

As the title is preceded on our fragment by *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp n nb t3wy*, the 'Chief Lector Priest of the Lord of the Two Lands' -a title strongly associating its bearer to the king- it is likely that the owner of the block performed the priestly duties of a *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp* and of a *sm*-priest in the Temple of Millions of Years of Ramses II at Abydos.

Three nobles from the time of Ramses II carried the latter title of *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp n nb t3wy*. One of them is the nobleman Minmes, to whom belong fragments of a statue found in Abydos,<sup>59</sup> and fragments of a Shabti found in a

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<sup>55</sup> Mariette, *Abydos*, I, 19, and Pl. 19e; A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Die Belegstellen zu Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*, Vols. I (Berlin, 1958), 17.19.

<sup>56</sup> C. R. Lepsius, *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, III (Geneve, 1972), Pl. 236a; *Wb Belegstellen*, I, 17.19.

<sup>57</sup> W. Erichsen, *Papyrus Harris: Hieroglyphische Transcription* (Brussels, 1933), 3; A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Die Belegstellen zu Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*, Vols. I and III (Berlin, 1951), 17.21.

<sup>58</sup> C. R. Lepsius, *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, Text III (Geneve, 1970), 298; *Wb Belegstellen*, I, 17.22.

<sup>59</sup> W. F. Petrie, *Abydos*, vol. I (London, 1902), 45.

tomb at Abydos,<sup>60</sup> as well as other artifacts including a block statue upon which is found the title *hrj-ḥbt hrj-tp n nb t3wy* and the cartouche of Ramses II.<sup>61</sup> The other two dignitaries are the Vizier Paser, who also held the title of *sm*-priest found on our block,<sup>62</sup> and the Chief of Works Thnnuroy,<sup>63</sup> who held that of a Royal Scribe,<sup>64</sup> and that of a Royal *sm*-priest.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, Ramses-Meryamun held the title *hrj-ḥbt m ḥwt nswt* the lector priest in the king's temple,<sup>66</sup> and the High Priest of Ptah Pahemneter, held the titles of *sm*-priest and *hrj-ḥbt*.<sup>67</sup>

Preceding these two titles on the side of the block is found remains of the title *sš*. We believe that the owner of the fragment also held the title of *sš nsw*, the royal scribe. Although *nsw* is missing with the broken part of the block, it is very unlikely that a dignitary with such high titles would be a simple scribe. *sš nsw* title was held by other top nobles such as the High Priests of Re at Heliopolis Bak,<sup>68</sup>

<sup>60</sup> J. Garstang, *El Arabah: A Cemetery of The Middle Kingdom; Survey of The Old Kingdom Temenos; Graffiti from The Temple of Sety* (London, 1901), 11, and Pl. XV.

<sup>61</sup> A. E. Weigall, "A Statuette of Min-Mes, Chief Magician to Rameses II", *PSBA* 23/1 (1901), 13-15.

<sup>62</sup> G. A. Gabballa, "Two Dignitaries of the XIXth Dynasty", *MDAIK* 30/1 (1974), 19; *KRI* III, 16:8.

<sup>63</sup> *KRI*, III, 480:8.

<sup>64</sup> *KRI*, III, 480:8.

<sup>65</sup> *KRI*, III, 485:12.

<sup>66</sup> *KRI*, III, 358.10; Forshaw, *Role of the Lector*, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Gabballa, "Two Dignitaries", 21-24. *KRI*, III, 411:10, 14.

<sup>68</sup> *KRI*, III, 315.

and Amenemope.<sup>69</sup> This title, however, is a title that does not indicate an actual position.<sup>70</sup>

Taking into consideration that in the title *sm m 3kht nhh*, the expression *3kht nhh*, was used to refer to a temple, palace, tomb or necropolis and is not a name for a specific locality, the nobleman Thnnuroy would be the only noble from the time of Ramses II who carried the three titles found on the our fragment as he is a *hrj-hbt hrj-tp n nb t3wy*, a *sm*-priest, and a *sš-nsw*,<sup>71</sup> presuming that this latter was on the block based on our argument above.

### Block identity

The question of the block identity is a hard one to answer. Although the style and high quality of the carvings suggests royal architecture, the existence of titles of an individual would rule this option out. Gabballa published another piece from Abydos which was similarly discovered in April 1872 and carries JE 21801,<sup>72</sup> a journal entry number preceding that of the block here studied. This may provide an indication that both pieces were found at the same time of excavations and likely the same locality, as they also share the same date and the same provenance, Ramses II reign and Abydos. The piece published by Gaballa was

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<sup>69</sup> *KRI*, III, 315.

<sup>70</sup> Fisher, *The Sons of Ramses II*, I, 63, 76, 86, 107, 114.

<sup>71</sup> *KRI*, III, 480:8, 485:12.

<sup>72</sup> G. A. Gabballa, "Some Nineteenth-Dynasty Monuments in Cairo Museum," *BIFAO* 71 (1972), 135-7.

found in the vicinity of the Temple of Ramses II in Abydos as indicated in the text that refers to the name of the temple *hwt-R<sup>c</sup>-ms-sw-mry-Imn m pr Wsir*.<sup>73</sup> We therefore suggest that our block was found in the vicinity of the temple of Ramses II at Abydos, a suggestion that would be supported by some finds of the site as shall be discussed below.

Only a few places at Abydos provided parallels to the block here discussed. The majority of tombs of Abydos were shaft tombs lined with mudbrick,<sup>74</sup> including those of the New Kingdom that likely had a superstructure built of mudbrick.<sup>75</sup> However, Mariette mentioned that the excavations in the North Necropolis at Abydos, located near the temple of Ramses II, reveal that the tombs of this area were used by the top elite.<sup>76</sup> It is possible that the block here studied was found in this area. We base our supposition on the quality of relief used on the block and on the fact that the area was used as cemetery for the Nineteenth Dynasty elite. In this location, Mariette discovered a number of high-quality stone stelae and some

<sup>73</sup> Gabballa, “Nineteenth-Dynasty Monuments”, 136.

<sup>74</sup> D. Randall-MacIver and A. C. Mace, *El Amrah and Abydos 1899-1901* (London, 1902); Petrie, *Abydos*, I; T. E. Peet, *The Cemeteries of Abydos*, vol. II (London, 1914).

<sup>75</sup> T. E. Peet and W. L. S. Loat, *The Cemeteries of Abydos*, vol. III, (London, 1913), 29-33; Peet, *Cemeteries of Abydos*, II, 84-5; Cahail, *In the Shadow of Osiris*, 359- 405.

<sup>76</sup> Mariette, *Abydos*, II, 44; S. R. Snap, *Mortuary Assemblages from Abydos*, Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy (Liverpool, 1986), 98-9.

door lintels belonging to nobles' tombs, some of which are dated to the time of Ramses II.<sup>77</sup>

With the titles written on its lower side and remains of carvings on the back, our block does not follow the characteristics of stelae, despite being recorded as one in the museum registers. We therefore suggest that our block was part of an upper lintel.<sup>78</sup> This might fit with the sun-disc *Pḥdy* that is usually placed at the upper sections of monuments in the middle of scene or above a king's image or name. Numerous parallels are found around Egyptian sites, originating from tombs, temples, or shrines.<sup>79</sup> As is the case in other upper lintels, the texts containing the names and titles of the king separate between two scenes. We speculate that the deities represented right and left of the text are facing figures of the king, or of the deceased offering to the divinities as is the case in similar representations.<sup>80</sup> The size of the block does not fit with the size of the upper lintels in the temples of Sety I or Ramses

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<sup>77</sup> Mariette, *Cat. D'Abydos*, 415-221.

<sup>78</sup> Lintels with scenes depicting gods see: British-Museum\_Egypt\_Sudan\_Newsletter6\_2019\_0.pdf

<sup>79</sup> *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae*, etc. (1910-1993), The British Museum, 12 vols, London, *BM Stelae*, VII, no. 1182, pl. 7; *BM Stelae*, X, no. 281, pl. 6; no. 1344, pl. 28; no. 597, pl. 66; no. 448, pl. 68; no. 598, pl. 77; *BM Stelae*, XII, no. 547, pl. 44-5; no. 153, pl. 56-7, block JE 32009; Fisher, *The Sons of Ramses II*, Pls 143B-144A.

<sup>80</sup> A. M. Calverley and M. F. Broome, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, vol. III (Chicago, 1938), pl. 43; The Epigraphic Survey, *The Eastern High Gate: With Translations of Texts*, Medinet Habu VIII, OIP 94 (Chicago, 1970), pl. 617, 627.

II in Abydos, where the lintels are of much larger size.<sup>81</sup> With its relatively small size and titles of a top elite noble, it could have belonged to a private tomb built in the North Necropolis near the temple of Ramses II mentioned by Mariette.

Additionally, the fragment contains titles of a high ranked dignitary, probably a high official of the nobles of Abydos. The time of Ramses II provided us with numerous fine works executed by his high officials that reflect the high status enjoyed by those elite. It is not unusual to find on these works the names, titles, and sometimes images of the king as well as those of the owner of the work.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, in the light of modern excavations at the site of Abydos, we can suggest another probability. In the area of North Abydos near the temple of Ramses II and the Portal Temple built by Ramses II where the North Cemetery is located, lies a votive area that contained New Kingdom royal and private memorial chapels as well as tombs.<sup>83</sup> Although built mostly in mudbrick, remains of stone blocks confirm the use of stone in door jambs and foundations in these chapels.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, it was

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<sup>81</sup> A. M. Calverley and M. F. Broome, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, vol. I (Chicago, 1933), pl. 9; Iskander and Goelet, *Temple of Ramses II*, 1/1, Pl. 2.4.8.

<sup>82</sup> Hayes, *Sceptre II*, 346.

<sup>83</sup> O'Connor, "Abydos", 36-8; Cahail, *In the Shadow of Osiris*, 342-3.

<sup>84</sup> O'Connor, "Abydos", 36-8; M. Pouls-Wegner, "New Fieldwork at Abydos: The Toronto Votive Zone Project", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 75:3 (2012), 181.

suggested based on stylistic features that sunk relief blocks of unknown provenance once belonged to structures of this location.<sup>85</sup> The area is near the Processional Road leading to the Osiris Temple nearby.<sup>86</sup> Annual festivals took place in this area where high dignitaries sent by the king to represent him in this occasion left stelae reflecting their strong connection to both the king and god Osiris.<sup>87</sup> We might therefore suggest that our block could have belonged to a chapel dedicated to Osiris by one of the top elite of Ramses II who participated in an annual festival on behalf of the king.

The high quality of carvings as well as the gold leaf would suggest that rather than belonging to a private tomb, it belonged to a small shrine built near the temple of Ramses II and dedicated to Osiris by one of his high officials, probably one who is his own son. The suggestion of a royal prince is due to the title *sm m 3ht nhh* only used by prince Meryatum, the son of Ramses II and the High Priest of Re at Heloipolis. However, three other candidates make eligible owners of the block. Those are the three nobles from the time of Ramses II who carried the title of *hrj-hbt*

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<sup>85</sup> Pouls-Wegner, “New Fieldwork at Abydos”, 181.

<sup>86</sup> M. Pouls-Wegner, “The Construction Accounts from the 'Portal Temple' of Ramesses II in North Abydos”, In: Z. Hawass, and J. Houser Wegner, eds., *Millions of Jubilees: Studies in Honor of David P. Silverman* (Cairo, 2010), 557; Cahail, *In the Shadow of Osiris*, 311.

<sup>87</sup> D. O'Connor, *Abydos, Egypt's First Pharaohs & the Cult of Osiris* (London, 2009), 33-4, and figs 6, 8, 10, 12.

*hrj-tp n nb t3wy*, Minmes,<sup>88</sup> the Vizier and *sm*-priest Paser,<sup>89</sup> and the Chief of Works, Royal Scribe, and Royal *sm*-priest Thnnuroy.<sup>90</sup> The latter, as he carries all three titles on the block, is a more likely choice, especially that -as suggested above- the expression *3ht nhh* is not a name for a specific location.

### Concluding comments

The gilded fragments here studied with figures of divinities and titles of a king and a nobleman, reflects the character of its provenance, a site that included a mixture of burials, temples and chapels for kings and nobles with a focus of the worship of Osiris. The block was likely found in the vicinity of the temple of Ramses II in the North Abydos Necropolis, where it once served as an upper lintel of a door in top elite tomb or in a private memorial chapel dedicated to Osiris in the occasion of the god's annual festival. The gold leaf and the high quality of the carving are supporting factors to the latter suggestion. Additionally, the option of the lintel belonging to the temple of King Ramses II, whose names and title are found inscribed on it, is ruled out due to its relatively small size and to the existence of private titles. The prospective owner of the building where this block once stood is believed to be Thnnuroy, a high dignitary from the time of Ramses II who

<sup>88</sup> Garstang, *El Arabah*, 11, and Pl. XV; Weigall, "A Statuette of Min-Mes", 13-15; Petrie, *Abydos*, I, 45.

<sup>89</sup> Gabballa, "Two Dignitaries", 19; *KRI* III, 16:8.

<sup>90</sup> *KRI*, III, 480:8, 485:12.

once bore the three titles inscribed on the block. The titles reflect that the owner was of very high status and performed priestly duties that made him a close confidant of the king.

With its well-preserved gold leaf, we recommend that upon return from its international tour, that the block would be a center piece in entrance of the museum with lights that would reveal the beauty of the gold leaf and of its fine carvings.

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