



## Unpublished Stela Fragment of A woman from Deir el-Bahari<sup>1</sup>

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### Keywords

Deir el-Bahari, Women,  
Votive, Stela, Hathor.

### Abstract

This paper is about an unpublished stela fragment of a woman from Deir el Bahari. It is now found in Luxor storeroom, no.207/GEM. 21875. This study aims to fully publish the stela, with an iconographical analysis and full translation of the texts. Possible stylistic dating and a discussion of the owner's name serve to restate the piece with regard to the identity of the owner. Other objectives include recognizing the name of the lady who owned the piece and identifying the missing deity in the lacuna. The methodology of this study depends on a descriptive, analytical, and comparative study which entails a deep description of the iconography, transliteration and translation of the texts, making a facsimile, and an analysis of the similar aspects between the studied stela and a set of other stelae from Deir el Bahari. The study findings revealed that votive stelae of Deir el Bahari have identical features and express the same ideas artistically. The workshops which produced cult objects had religious knowledge about the nature of the deities and their myths. This is reflected in the funerary iconography that they produced.

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## I-Introduction

Deir el-Bahari<sup>2</sup> witnessed a large number of excavations during the last century, which unearthed many discoveries. Some of the most significant objects to emerge from these excavations were votive offerings. The ancient Egyptians made these offerings believing that this practice could establish a solid personal relationship between them and their favored deities. These votive objects include linen cloths, faience plaques, clay figurines, ear tablets, and small stelae found in or near Hathor shrines at Deir el-Bahari (Pinch & Waraksa 2009).

The site was traditionally connected to the goddess Hathor. Allam supposed that the cult of Hathor was first introduced in Deir el Bahari by King Montuhotep II at his mortuary temple, which paid considerable homage to her cult (Allam 1963). In the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, the cult of Hathor flourished, and many shrines were dedicated to her; for instance, the chapel within Hatshepsut's mortuary temple and the chapel within Tuthmosis III's temple. Votive objects, such as Hathor masks, Bes amulets, and fertility figurines were present in some 18th Dynasty temple foundation deposits and were regarded as an official part of the temple's function. Pinch studied most of the votive objects discovered at Deir el Bahari. Her publication is one of the essential literature reviews on this subject (Pinch & Waraksa 2009; Pinch1993).

Votive stelae were regarded as personal gifts expressing religious piety, often containing requests for mercy and aid or thanks for benefits and cures. Women associated with goddess Hathor and had a large share of votive objects which dedicated to her at Deir el Bahari. They believed that after their death, they would be born again through Hathor and meet her in the afterlife, where she would provide provision and sustenance as a mistress from the west (Bussmann 2017; Basson 2012).

## II-Discussion

This research focuses on an unpublished stela fragment for a woman which was possibly offered as an ex-voto in one of the Deir el Bahari temples. It was found around the cliff of Tuthmosis III temple remains.<sup>3</sup> This fragment will be studied in full detail in the following lines:

<b>Current Location</b>	Luxor Storeroom, no.207/ GEM.21875
<b>Material</b>	Sandstone
<b>Find Location</b>	Deir El-Bahari
<b>Conservation</b>	Destruction in the left side and upper part
	H. 31.6 CM
	W. 10 CM

<sup>2</sup> Deir el-Bahri is located on the western shore of Thebes which was called "Djeser-Djeseru" the Holy of Holies". The current name comes from the Arabic, meaning "Monastery of the North" indicating to an early established of Christian community there (Bunson 2014).

<sup>3</sup>The initial data of the fragment was obtained by a request to the **Artifact & Information department in the Grand Egyptian Museum**. According to the Museum database, the stela fragment is found in Luxor storeroom, no.207 and will be moved to Grand Egyptian Museum with number, GEM.21875

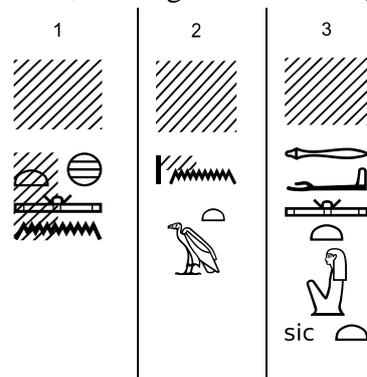
<b>Dimensions</b>	Th.9 CM
<b>Technique</b>	Painted relief with traces of red, black, blue, and reddish brown color.
<b>Publication</b>	Unpublished

## II.1-Description

Three fragments of a stela (Fig.1) are made of painted sandstone and represent a standing woman before a bark. The woman wears a long tripartite wig with an open lotus blossom on her forehead and a long transparent dress, over which a coat with fringes, colored in red, covers both her arms with wide sleeves reaching to the elbows. She also wears blue-colored bracelets. She holds a sistrum and possibly flowers; only their long stems can be seen. She is facing a boat on the left, but only the prow remains. It takes the shape of a papyrus flower.

## II.2-Text

Above the standing woman are only remnants of hieroglyphic signs in three vertical lines, reading from left to right as follows:



(1) (.....) *h(t) n* (2) (.....) *n mwt* (3) (....)*t*  
 (1) (.....) (Every) thing to (2) (.....) of Mwt (3) (...) - Aat

Unfortunately, the upper part that seemingly contained the inscriptions is broken, see (Fig.2). The remaining signs could be reconstructed as column no.1, which probably includes a portion of *hṭp di nsw* formula because the word *hṭ* which was perhaps followed by *nbt*, means ‘everything,’ is always followed by the prepositional phrase *n k3 n* + name of the person.<sup>4</sup> Column no.2 contains the first syllable of the lady's name, or possibly a part of an epithet such as (*šm<sup>c</sup>yt* or *h<sup>s</sup>yt*) *n Mut*.<sup>5</sup> Column no.3 includes the rest of her name, ending with a female determinative.

The letter *t* is shown mistakenly added after the female determinative in column no.3. A similar orthography occurs on the stela of Bankes no.7 which includes the letter *t* after the name. The occurrence of this unnecessary addition was abundant in the New Kingdom and can be understood from the context (Černy1958, no.7).

<sup>4</sup> For more examples of the *hṭp di nsw* formula and its contents, see Louvre stela no. E 16344 (Barbotin 2005; Bruyère 1939).

<sup>5</sup> *šm<sup>c</sup>yt* means chantress or songstress. In the Ramesside period, there was an increase in the number of women who held the title *šm<sup>c</sup>yt*. The epithet became more accessible to wealthy and lesser elite women. For more reading. See; (Onstine 2001)

### II.3-Commentary

The donor of the stela is a lady whose name is inscribed above her head. Three suggested possibilities for reading the name of the woman are:



First, if the stroke beside the preposition *n* was the sign  *ndm*, the full name might be Nodjemet-Mut(...)-aat. On the other hand, If it were an ordinary vertical stroke, the name would be Mut(...) aat. The carving and the size of the sign support the second argument. Ranke listed the name *ndmtmwt* as a female name attested in the New Kingdom and was written in this form as;  or . It deserves to mention, however, that the name copied by Ranke is much different than that found on the stela. He also recorded the name Mutaat which was inscribed in this way . It seems that the woman's name consisted of three syllables; the middle one is missing, so the two names provided by Ranke are not suitable here as they include only two syllables (RPN.I, 148.8, 147.12).

The final assumption is more persuasive as the first syllable, “(...) *n Mut*,” might be a part of the woman's title, which possibly was “*šmꜣyt n Mut*.” The woman holds a sistrum indicating her position as a songstress. The title *šmꜣyt* is usually juxtaposed with “*nbt pr*” denoting marital status. Lesko assumed the former title was an honorific, whereas the musical instruments that the women held indicated that it was a function (Ives 2002). The second syllable in column.3 is (*ꜥt*) part of her name. Unfortunately, the first half is missing, leading to difficulty identifying her origin.

The dimensions of the stela and the proportions of the woman's figure imply that the stela's design consisted of only one large register depicting a woman worshipping a deity in a boat. Unfortunately, the portion depicting the deity is missing. There are several possibilities for the identity of this god or goddess.

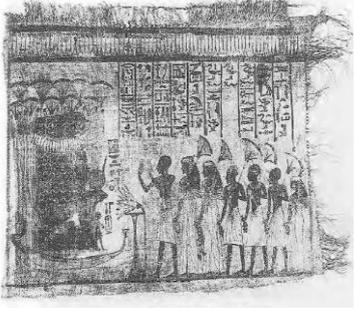
#### II.3.1-The Identity of the Missing Deity

Through examining a corpus of votive offerings of stelae and linen clothes from Deir el-Bahari, analyzing their reliefs is shown the following:

Table.1: The selected examples from Deir el-Bahari:

No	Museum	Description	Figures
1	British Museum, EA689	Upper part of a round-topped limestone stela depicting the Hathor-cow suckling the king (head only visible); another royal figure stands beneath the head of the cow; representation of the mountains of Deir el-Bahari in the background. Date: 18 <sup>th</sup> dynasty. Bib: (Neville 1907) <a href="https://www.britishmuseum.or">https://www.britishmuseum.or</a>	 Fig.3 © The Trustees of the British Museum

		g/collection/object/Y_EA689	
2	Philadelphia, Penn museum, E11818A	<p>A rounded top stela consists of two records. The upper is depicted with winged-sun disc, beneath is a representation of a cow Hathor with sun disc between its horns, facing the enthroned king on the right, his cartouche testifies that he is Amenhotep II, only his throne and legs are seen.</p> <p>The lower record represents a standing woman facing left. She wears a long tight dress with one shoulder strap and a tripartite wig. She holds an incense burner and a libation vase with which she pours water into another vessel on the ground. Behind, her husband and her son hold offerings like the triangular bread.</p> <p>Date: 18th dynasty. Bib: (Naville 1907)</p>	 <p>Fig.4 ©Philadelphia, Courtesy of Penn Museum.</p>
3	British Museum, EA 41518	<p>A broken small stela with a curved part depicts a sun disk with a single wing and Wedjat eye, beneath, remains of Hathor within Papyrus marshes facing a standing woman whose name is inscribed before her as Tahumay. She is wearing along wig and a long tight-fitting dress. She clutches a censer bowl in her left hand and a libation vase in her right, pouring water into another shallow bowl on the ground.</p> <p>Bib: (Budge1914).</p>	 <p>Fig.5 (Budge1914,pl.41)</p>
4	Hermitage Museum, Inv.No. 2400	<p>Painted linen is portrayed with a scene of goddess Hathor in papyrus marshes.</p> <p>Bib. (Pinch 1993)</p>	 <p>Fig.6 © Hermitage Museum, Inv. No. 2400</p>

5	Huntingdon, Long Island, HM,19. 294	A piece of votive cloth drawn with Hathor as a cow in papyrus marshes within a boat.  Bib: (Pinch 1993)	 <p data-bbox="1023 483 1262 551">Fig.7 Pinch 1993, pl.21.</p>
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The models from Deir el Bahari were chosen based on their similarity with the unpublished fragment. In the above table (1), the stelae nos. (1-2) contain a royal figure worshipping a cow. The third stele was selected for comparison because appears to represent a woman offering to a cow that possibly stands on a boat. The two votive cloth tablets are also paralleled to the stela fragment because of similar themes and the presence of the boat motif.

A question emerges as to why Hathor was depicted in a boat. Why assume the deity was Hathor, after all, Hathor was not the only deity that was worshipped in Deir el-Bahari. She is frequently depicted inside a boat or in a marsh relief from the early 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The cow and papyrus motifs refer to the protection of Horus, who was nursed by Hathor as an infant in the *Chemmis*. This was also the location where the king was thought to have been birthed from the divine cow and given new life by her milk. This cow has been linked to several goddesses, but Hathor is the one with which she is most often associated the protection and nurture of Horus and thus the King in the New Kingdom. The dedicators of votive stelae and textiles may have wanted to conjure up the image of Hathor in *Chemmis*. The kings used to be portrayed suckling from Hathor like Horus in *Chemmis*. Thus, the private individuals imitated the kings to desire a filial relationship with Hathor (Pinch 1993).

The Egyptians conceptualized death and rebirth through Hathor, as she was the provider of food and nourishment in the afterlife to all classes of society. This is illustrated by Spell 148 of the Book of the Dead, which narrates the rebirth and sustenance of the deceased by the cows: "Hail to you ... I know the names of the seven cows and their bull who give bread and beer ... may you ... make provision for me, so that I may ... come into being under your hinder-parts" (Basson 2012). As noted above, the significance of Hathor and her connection with the papyrus marsh supports her identification with the deity in the broken portion.

The sistrum with papyrus stalks in the lady's hand supports the proposed argument. Both items were used in a ritual called (*sšš w3d n ht-ht*), performed for Hathor, as stated in PT (388). The offering of papyrus *w3d* was a token of renewing life and joy for the person who offered it. The term "*sšš w3d*" is not merely offering the papyrus but rattling. This explanation comes from the collocation of "*sšš w3d*," as the sistrum "*sšš.t*" is derived from the verb *sšš*, a musical instrument of Hathor that is assumed to imitate the sound of rustling papyrus. The papyrus's shaking was purposed

for Hathor's invocation, propitiation and the rhythmic accompaniment to her voyage through the papyrus groves (Bleeker 1973).

### II.3.2- The criteria for dating the stela fragment

It is possible to propose an accurate date for this fragment through its stylistic features. It is probably dated to the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty because the way that the woman is represented with her dress and wig was widespread in the Ramesside period. Very similar representations of women with painted dresses occur on the Shabti-box, BM EA.41548 of Henutmehyt, Mummy board of Tamutnefret, 2620, and Tomb TT 277, entrance right-side (figs.8-11). The technique of painting reliefs is polychrome decoration on a yellow ground (Taylor 1999; Berlandini 2002; Vandier D'abbadie 1954).

All representations feature elaborate wigs and collars (Taylor 1999). Many commonalities exist between the pieces: they share the representation of the hands, arms, facial features, and body proportions. All depict women wearing the same loosely-draped dress characteristic of elite 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty women, shaded with reddish-brown color. All share a heavy tripartite wig with a large open blossom (Robins 1995). The detailed description of this characteristic dress is a loose white robe that reaches the ankles, covered by a reddish tunic or sash with fringed edges, or a red coat with medium sleeves.



**Fig.8**  
A representation of (Ct) from her stela fragment  
© Courtesy of Grand Egyptian Museum, GEM 21875.



**Fig.9**  
A representation of Henutmehyt from her Shabti-box.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum, EA41548.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig.10**  
A representation of Nefertary, Tomb TT 277, entrance right side.  
© Osirisnet.net.<sup>7</sup>



**Fig.11**  
A representation of Tamutnefret from her openwork mummy-board.  
© 2002 Musée du Louvre / Georges Poncet.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA41548\\_1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA41548_1) Accessed on 20 April 2022

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.osirisnet.net/popupImage.php?img=/tombes/nobles/ameneminet277/photo/ameneminet277\\_db\\_0455.jpg&lang=en&sw=1024&sh=768](https://www.osirisnet.net/popupImage.php?img=/tombes/nobles/ameneminet277/photo/ameneminet277_db_0455.jpg&lang=en&sw=1024&sh=768) Accessed on 25 June 2022

<sup>8</sup> <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010025548> Accessed on 20 April 2022

The dress style exists in the four pieces (figs.8–11); two are probably from Deir el Bahari (figs.8–9) and the other two (figs.10–11) from Shiekh abd El-Qurnah and Qurnet Murai in order. The women share the title *šmꜣyt*. In addition, all lived in the Ramesside period. The representations prove that women were clad in that fashionable robe, "living costume," whether in an offering, adoration, or funerary context (Vandier D'abbadie 1954; Taylor 1999; Berlandini 2002; Betro 2020).

In tracing the festal dress at some Theban tombs from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties, Deir el-Medina (TT216; TT267; TT335) and Qurnet Murai (TT277; TT278), the artisans seemingly used to depict mainly two outfits of women's dresses: a white transparent dress open in the front, sometimes pleated with a white sash knotted beneath the breast. The women's second outfit consisted of a red sash and an inner sleeveless white dress. Then this sash developed and took the shape of a tunic or a coat that reached the knees with medium sleeves (Vandier D'abbadie 1954; Foucart & et al 1928; Bruyère 1926; Valbelle 1975).

A question is raised about the dress's connection with a particular profession and whether it was allowed to be worn by the less elite and middle classes. Ives has speculated that it might be associated with songstresses, but it was for all prestigious ladies, whether songstresses or not (Ives 2002).

In conclusion, the dress might be an innovative style by the artisans in the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty that testifies to the high status of the woman, not the profession. A 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty date is further supported by the excessive letter t in the owner's name, which initially appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty (Barbotin 2005, E 16344; Černý 1958, no.7).

### III-Conclusion

In summary, the stela fragment was owned by a lady whose name was probably (*ꜣt*). It was dedicated to Hathor, as evidenced by the similarity between the motif of the boat and depictions of Hathor in the marsh. This relief was an identity mark of Deir el-Bahari. The stylistic and linguistic features of the fragment support a dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. This stela is important because its large simple composition does not leave room for a male partner meaning that the stela depicts a woman as a sole owner and expresses her own relationship with the deity in question, who is probably Hathor.

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**Fig.2 :** A stela fragment facsimile.  
© Drawing by Cheryl Westenberg<sup>9</sup>



**Fig.1:** A stela fragment of the woman *ʿ3t*.  
© Grand Egyptian Museum, GEM.21875

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## المخلص

### لوحة غير منشورة لإمرأة من الدير البحري

يُنَاقش البحث لوحة غير منشورة لإمرأة , تم اكتشافها في الدير البحري , لم يسبق نشرها او دراستها من قبل , توجد الآن في مخزن الأقصر وسيتم نقلها إلى المتحف المصري الكبير , القاهرة , وذلك طبقاً لقاعدة بيانات المتحف تحت رقم GEM.21875 . يهدف البحث الي دراستها وتحليلها فنياً ولغويًا , ومقارنة الاساليب الفنية بينها وبين اللوحات الأخرى المكتشفة من الدير البحري لتحديد تأريخها الصحيح , والتعرف علي اسم السيدة , وتحديد ماهية الاله/ الالهة المفترض الممثل في الجزء المفقود. تعتمد منهجية البحث علي الدراسة الوصفية والتحليلية للمناظر والنصوص والمنهج المقارن بناء علي مجموعة مختارة من اللوحات النذرية المكتشفة من الدير البحري , وضحت نتائج الدراسة أن الورشة المسؤولة عن انتاج اللوحات والقطع الجنازية والنذرية لإقليم الدير البحري لها سمات فنية مميزة , كشفت عن معرفتها الدينية لماهية الالهة ومكوناتها وانعكاسها فنياً في التصوير الجنزي .