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**Unpublished Funerary Coptic Stela (S3-439)
At Sheikh Hamad antiquities Storehouse, Sohag**

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الملخص:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى نشر لوحة جنائزية قبطية* (شكل ١، ٢) بالإضافة إلى مناقشة النص وتاريخ هذه اللوحة من خلال الدراسات السابقة، اللوحة من مخزن آثار الشيخ حمد بسوهاج، وهي مسجلة برقم (S3-439). تم العثور على هذه اللوحة في مخزن ورثة التاجر إسحاق مجلع بأخميم، والتي تم تسجيلها بسجل المجلس الأعلى للآثار بتاريخ ١٩٩٥/٦/٢٢ وحُفظت بالمخزن رقم "٤" صندوق رقم "٣" بقاعة الأرشيف بمعبد سيتي الأول بأبيدوس. ثم نُقلت اللوحة إلى مخزن آثار الشيخ حمد بسوهاج.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لوحة قبطية جنائزية ، نقش قبطي ، شاهد قبر قبطي، لوحة (S3-439).

Abstract:

This article aims to publish a stela (Figs. 1, 2) from Sheikh Hamad Antiquities Storehouse, Sohag (S3-439), The stela was found in the store of heirs of the trader Isaac Megla'a in Akhmim, which was registered in the inventory of Supreme Council of Antiquities on 22/6/1995 which are kept in the storehouse Number 4, box number 3 in the Archive Hall at Sety I temple in Abydos. Then the stela was transferred to Sheikh Hamad Antiquities Storehouse, Sohag.

Keywords

Coptic funerary stela, Coptic Inscription, Coptic tombstone, Stela (S3- 439).

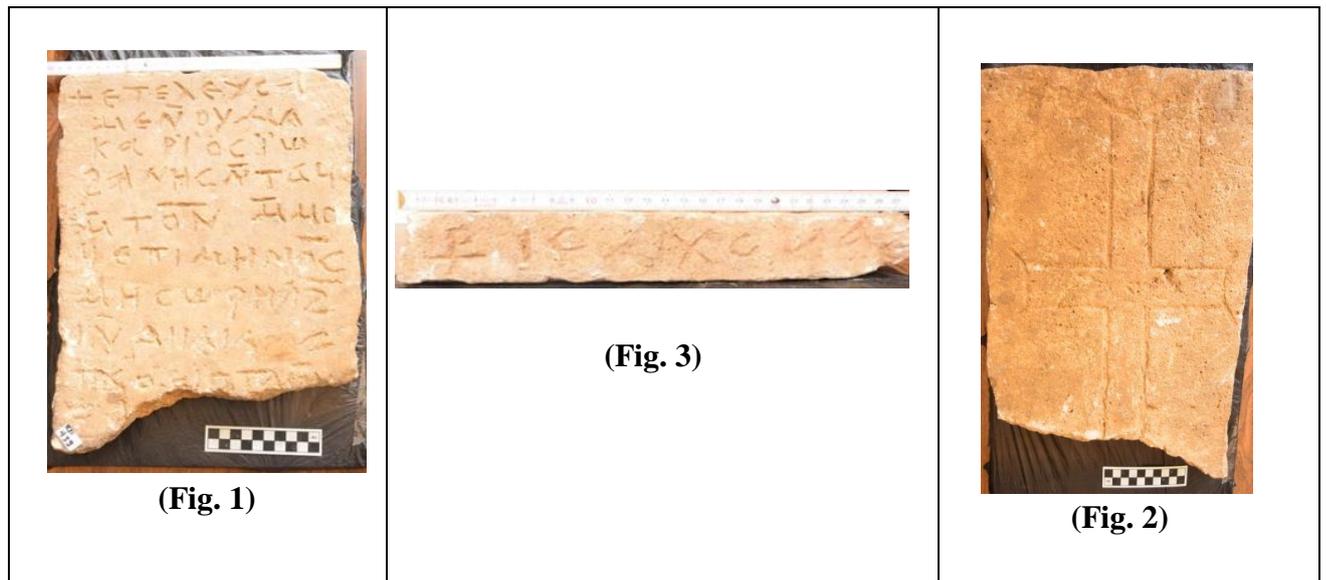
Description of the stela:

The stela is made from limestone with dimensions 33(H) x 27 (W) CM, THICKNESS: 5 CM and almost rectangular with a Coptic sunk inscription on the front side, top edge, and a big engraved cross on the back side. The stela has been chipped from the bottom extending with the width of the stela with only a small portion on the left side remaining. There is a loss of text, at least two lines, in the lower part. The inscription was poorly written. (Fig. 1).

Introduction:

The stela is an epitaph made of stone, like most tombstones from Egypt, they were not meant to be framed in a wall or pavement but designed as detached objects. Moreover, it was created as an isolated object that could easily be transported. ⁽¹⁾

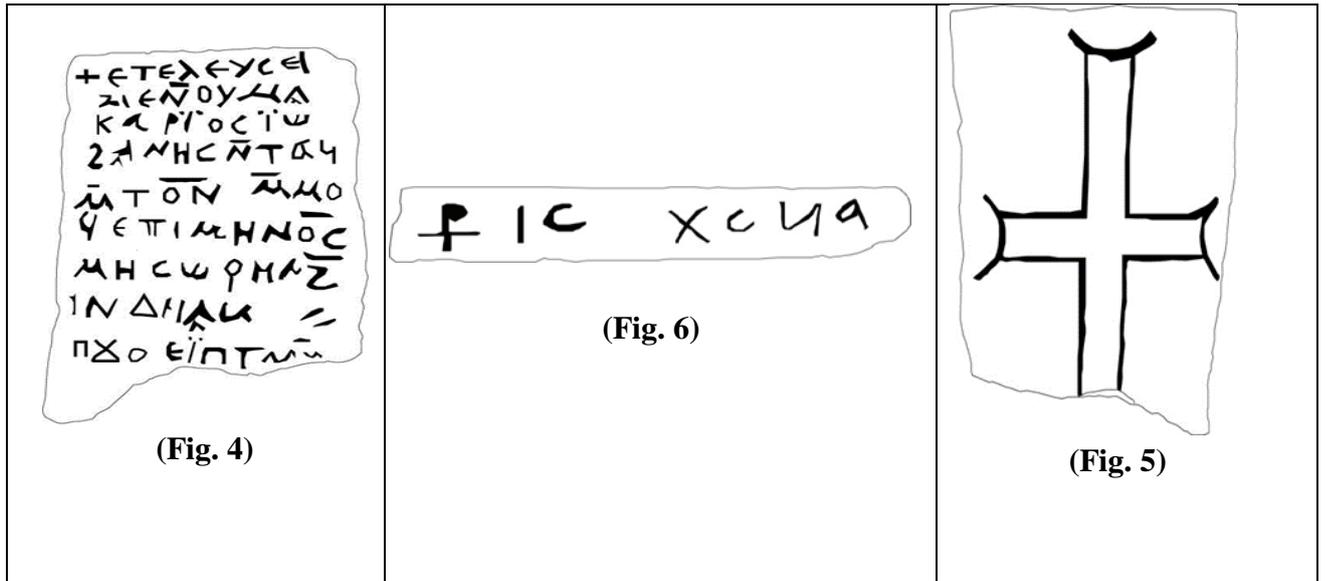
This Coptic funerary stela which will be published in this article, it was found for first time in the store of heirs of the trader Isaac Megla'a in Akhmim and registered by supreme council of antiquities on 22 June 1995. There was no information on its provenance, the Coptic stela now kept in Sheikh Hamad antiquities storage.



(Figs. 1, 2, 3, Coptic Funerary Stela (S3-439), (Photo by Author)

*The Author got the approval of the permanent committee of the supreme council of the antiquities on Apr 13 2016 to study and publish this stela.

⁽¹⁾ Eissa,M. and Dekker,R., (2018) “the latest known (Bohairic) Coptic epitaphs (NMEC 46 and 47” JCOptS 20 (2018), pp. 57-79.



(Figs. 4, 5, 6, Coptic Funerary Stela (S3-439)), (tracing by Author)

Text:

- 1- ⲕⲉⲧⲉⲗⲉϥⲥⲉⲓ
- 2- [ⲡ]ⲙⲉ(?) ⲛⲟϥⲙⲁ
- 3- ⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲓⲱ
- 4- ⲉⲁⲛⲛⲥ ⲛⲉⲧⲁϥ
- 5 - ⲙⲉⲧⲟⲛ ⲙⲉⲙⲟ
- 6 - ϥ ⲉ ⲡⲓⲙⲛⲟⲥ
- 7- ⲙⲛⲥⲱⲣⲛⲓ ⲓⲉ
- 8- ⲓⲛⲉⲁⲛⲁⲕ [ⲉ?]
- 9- ⲡⲫⲟⲉⲓⲥ..... (?)

Translation

Ended life [the] true person Blessed Johannes who went to rest in seventeenth (day of) the month Mesori indiction (5?) ... the lord.

Text (the top edge of the stela)

ⲡ ⲓⲥ ⲫⲥ ⲛⲁ(?)

Translation

Jesus Christ.....?

Discussion

This studied stela bears similarities to the stela that is housed at Coptic Museum Cairo, inv. 8636. ⁽¹⁾

1.1. The epitaph starts with a Greek death formula ⁽²⁾ ΕΤΕΛΕΥC[ΕΙ?] « It is the past tense of the Greek verb τελευτω, which means "to die" lit., he ended» ⁽³⁾, followed by the most common death formula in Coptic funerary inscriptions (l. 4-6: Ν ΤΑϠ

Μ ΤΟ ----- □ Ν ----- □ ΜΟϠ, "to go to rest") ⁽⁴⁾ and dating formula according to the indication system (l. 6-8).

The Greek death formula *etheleothe* 1.1 used in the Greek epitaphs from Kalabsha, Dakka, Eremenne in Nubia and also, used in epitaph from Panopolis ⁽⁵⁾, I think that the scribe of this stela was influenced by the Greek death formula as a result of being good in Greek as Coptic, Girgis, W. A. mentioned that “ *a number of Greek words were taken over into Coptic not because their native equivalent failed to convey the right meaning, but simply because the writer preferred a word which may have sounded nicer to his ear, or because he did not wish to use a common-place expression, or simply to avoid repeating a word, when he had to use the same expression in a subsequent passage.* ” ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Brunsch, W. (1995). Koptische und Griechische inschriften in Kairo, Egitto e Vicino Oriente, V. 18, p. 98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24233278>, Łajtar, A. (1998), Griechische und Koptische Inschriften im Koptischen Museum Kairo: eine Fortsetzung, The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, V. 28 p. 29.

⁽²⁾ « Ετελυτησεν ο μακαριτης NN "Blessed" NN _"ended life" _D», Tudor, B., (2011) Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt, Marburg. p. 275.

⁽³⁾ Daressy, G. (1914) "Renseignements sur la provenance des steles coptes du Musee du Caire", ASAE 1, p.268.

⁽⁴⁾ Tudor, B., (2011) Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt, Marburg, p. 196., Khalil, A., (2022). Two Coptic inscriptions in the Abou El-goud storage magazine, Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists. V.8. pp. 121-128.

⁽⁵⁾ Tudor, B., (2011) Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt, Marburg, p. 162.

⁽⁶⁾ Girgis, W.A., (1964) Greek loan words in Coptic (in religion, Abba Pchomius Al-Muharraki), (Part I). Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte V. 17 pp.63-73.

ll. 2-3. «According to Turner, the epithet ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ is Greek one and the copts used it to be away from pagan concepts but according to Hannig, this epithet is ancient Egyptian from (*m3^c hrw*) which means (true of voice) and used in Greek by ending ΟC»⁽¹⁾

l. 7. «The twelfth month of the ancient Egyptian and Coptic calendars, *ms-r^c*».⁽²⁾

l. 8. «The indication system-a method of fiscal reckoning – was introduced in the Roman Empire by Emperor Diocletian in 297 AD. In the beginning it was not applied to dating documents, but chiefly to taxing procedures in a given year. The indiction was a 15-year tax assessment period. The date by indiction year was initiated in Egypt in 314 AD. It emerged in the 312-327 AD cycle as a supplement to other chronological systems, such as the consulates and the regnal years. »⁽³⁾

Regarding the edge top of the stela (see Fig. 3) is written with the invocation formula ΙC ΧC ΝΑ(?), «I suggest may be this acclamation which means "Jesus Christ is victor!" and ΝΑ abbreviated form ΝΙΚΑ which means victor! ».⁽⁴⁾

The scribe started the text with the Greek Cross + also used the Monogram cross $\overline{\Gamma}$ on the edge of the stela.⁽⁵⁾

Some orthography notes:

the scribe used the letter α with different form in three words (ll.2-4-8), also used the abbreviations in two words on the edge of the stela ΙC ΧC.

Trema: it was written three times in the words (ΟΥΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ- ἸΩΣΑΝΗΣ-ΠΧΟΕΙC).

The super linear stroke: A straight stroke extends over two letters on: ΟΝ, ΟC, or extends over one letter as Ν.

Dialect: Sahidic

(1) Abdel Aziz, A., (2014), A group of tombstones of Coptic tombs from Ansna and Menqbad from the third century to the seventh century AD comparative linguistic and cultural analysis, Unpublished master thesis (Arabic), Asyut, p.156.

(2) Černý, J. (1976) A Coptic Etymological Dictionary, Cambridge 1976, p.91.

(3) Tudor, B., (2011), Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt, Marburg, p. 143.

(4) Tudor, B., (2011) Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt, Marburg, p. 296.

(5) Khalil, A., (2018) Three Sahidic Coptic Funerary Stelae from upper Egypt, Journal of Archaeological Research and Studies, V. 3, p.3, for more information about the types of crosses, see Kamel, I. and Girgis, G. (1987) Coptic Funerary Stelae. Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée copte Nos. 1-253, Cairo, pp. 23-24

Dating:

The dates of death of the people commemorated in the Christian epitaphs from Egypt consist of the day, month and indication year, or of the day or the month in which the respective people died.

According to E. Revillout, when the day and the indiction year are expressed by letters with numerical value, those letters come, as a rule, after the month name and the Greek word *indiktionos*, respectively. Contrary to E. Revillout's assertion, the number of the indiction year can come either before or after the word *indiktion*, in both the Greek and the Coptic dating clauses.⁽¹⁾

Concerning the date, it is suggested that the text was ascribed between the 6th & the 8th century because:

-The Cross as this sign + seems to be starting used in the texts since 6th AD, but became common since 8th AD.

-Using this sign Ⲛ as a cross began had been used on the Coptic stelae until the seventh century (i.e the reign of the Emperor Heraclius).⁽²⁾

-The Greek word *ΜΗΝΟC* which means month was written by this form in texts date back to 7thAD.⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Tudor, B., (2011), *Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt*, Marburg, p.143.

⁽²⁾ Elnassari A., (2011), *Three Coptic stelae from Middle Egypt*, in: *CASAE (42) 2011*, Cairo: Ministry of State for Antiquities, 145-156., Abdel Aziz, A., (2014), *A group of tombstones of Coptic tombs from Ansna and Menqbad from the third century to the seventh century AD comparative linguistic and cultural analysis*, Unpublished master thesis (Arabic), Asyut, p.3.

⁽³⁾ Förster, H.,(2002) . *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten*, Berlin.p. 521

Conclusion:

Funerary stela were part of the architectural design of tombs, and funerary inscriptions preserved the memory of the deceased among the living. Coptic funerary stelae were cut out of limestone and sandstone; they were rarely made of marble, wood, clay, terracotta, or pottery.⁽¹⁾ The owner of this Coptic tombstone is called Johannes, the information about the owner of the stela is brief, this article suggested that the Coptic tombstone was written between the 6th and the 8th century.

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⁽¹⁾ Amin, M., (2022), Coptic Funerary Stela, No. 769 in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, Journal of Tourism, Hotels and Heritage (JTHH), Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 21-32.

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