Unpublished Funerary Coptic Stela (S3-439)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

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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.

Text:
1- ἀπετελεύσα[ε]?
2- [Ἱ]ΜΕ (?) ΝΟΥΜΑ
3- ΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΙΩ
4- ΖΑΗΝΗΣ Ν-ΤΑΙ
5- Ν-ΓΩΝΗ Ν-ΜΟ
6- ΧΕ ΠΙΜΗΝΟϹ
7- ΜΗΣΟΡΗ ΙΖ
8- ΝΗ-ΑΝΑΚ [Ε ?]
9- ΠΗΣΟΕΙϹ.... (?)

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)
Π IC ΧC ΗΑ (?)
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) ἐθέλεω "It is the past tense of the Greek verb τελευτάω, which means "to die" lit., he ended" (3), followed by the most common death formula in Coptic funerary inscriptions (l. 4-6: ἀναπαυσα, "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, Eremennne 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).


ll. 2-3. «According to Turner, the epithet \( \text{ⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣ Ⲁⲥ} \) is Greek one and the copts used it to be away from pagan concepts but according to Hannig, this epithet is ancient Egyptian from \( (m\text{ⲕr hrw}) \) which means (true of voice) and used in Greek by ending \( \text{ⲟⲥ} \).\(^{(1)}\)

l. 7. «The twelfth month of the ancient Egyptian and Coptic calendars, \( mS-r\text{ⲓⲧ} \).\(^{(2)}\)

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 indication was a 15-year tax assessment period. The date by indication 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 \( \text{ⲇⲥ ⲃⲥ ⱃⲁ} \), «I suggest may be this acclamation which means "Jesus Christ is victor!" and \( \text{ⲃⲁ} \) abbreviated form \( \text{ⲃⲃⲁ} \) which means victor!».\(^{(4)}\)

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

**Some orthography notes:**

the scribe used the letter \( \text{ⲧ} \) with different form in three words (ll.2-4-8), also used the abbreviations in two words on the edge of the stela \( \text{ⲇⲧ} \).

Trema: it was written three times in the words \( \text{ⲟⲩⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣ Ⲁⲥ Ⲁⲥ ⱃⲁⲛⲥ ⲡⲟⲉ Ⲁⲥ} \).

The super linear stroke: A straight stroke extends over two letters on: \( \text{ⲟⲩ, Ⲁⲥ} \), or extends over one letter as \( \text{ⲃ} \).

Dialect: Sahidic

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\(^{(1)}\) 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.


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 indication 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 indication year can come either before or after the word indication, 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 ⲟ 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 Ⲅⲓⲧⲓ Ⲡⲓⲧⲓ ⲡⲧⲓ Ⲣⲟⲧⲓ which means month was written by this form in texts date back to 7th AD. (3)

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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 6\(^{th}\) and the 8\(^{th}\) 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.

