



The Stela of Mery

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THE STELA OF MERY

BETWEEN the first and second cataracts of the Nile, in lower Nubia lies the modern village of Anibeh. There during the New Kingdom lay Mem, provincial capitol and residence of the Egyptian Viceroy. In 1907, while working for the Museum, Dr. Randall MacIver discovered in a cemetery not far from the ruins of this ancient city the painted sandstone stela shown in the frontispiece. The stela now on exhibition in the Upper Egyptian Hall was found in the tomb chapel of Mery, Overseer of the King's Treasury in Nubia about 1150 B.C. and is dedicated to him and to his wife Taweretherty. Mery was a son of Prince Pennut who was the head of a family prominent in the district and whose members held various offices.

The pictorial part of the stela consists of two registers. In the upper register, at the left, the deceased, Mery, with hands raised in adoration, stands before the seated sun-deity, Rē-Harakhte. Ma'at, the goddess of truth, stands behind his chair. At the right, Mery is supplicating Osiris, great god of the dead, who is seated before an altar upon which is a lotus and penannular objects. Behind Osiris stands his sister-wife Isis. In the lower register, Mery and his wife are seated before an altar while members of their family pay their respects to them. The first figure is pouring a libation upon the base of the altar with one hand while in his left he holds an incense-burner.

The color is remarkably well-preserved; the reproduction does not really do justice to the brilliance of the original. The background is painted a dark reddish-yellow color. The human figures are outlined in dark red. The skin of the men is red except where it shows through their garments, when it is pink like the flesh of the women. All wear white garments which are striped with gray to represent pleating. Men and women alike wear about their necks blue and green collars summarily depicted, blue bracelets, outlined with white, and black wigs. Their finger-nails are painted white.

The figures of the gods are outlined in black, those of the goddesses in red. The skin of the goddesses is yellow while that of Rē-Harakhte is red with face yellow and black markings; the body of Osiris is blue except for his feet which are green. The eyes are all treated like those of the human figures, that is, the outlines and pupils are black, the balls white. Outlined in red, Rē-Harakhte's clothing is yellow striped with red, except for a blue portion between the horizontal band at the top and his arm. Ma'at wears a dark green close-fitting skirt with a thin blue stripe at the top. Isis is clothed in red with a top-edging of yellow which has red lines and just below this a thin blue stripe. The borders of both garments are yellow with red lines. Osiris is attired in a colorful dress, the upper part of which is red with large and small spots of blue and white respectively. A narrow band between the neck and bead-collar is yellow with red stripes, while below the hands it is dark green.

The two goddesses and Rē-Harakhte wear green wigs, the former having red ties behind theirs. The feather, symbol of Ma'at worn on her head, is blue; the seat, symbol of Isis, red. The disk and uræus upon the falcon-head of Rē-Harakhte are yellow, the uræus marked with red. The crown worn by Osiris is called the *atef*-crown. It consists of horns and the Crown of Upper Egypt between feathers. In this instance the crown is yellow, the feathers blue with lines and outlines black. The horns are blue as is the streamer at the back and also the beard. The collars are blue and green except Rē-Harakhte's which is blue with black markings; bracelets blue, those of the goddesses outlined in white, those of Osiris green, outlined with white; the armlets worn by the goddesses blue, Ma'at's outlined in white, those of Isis in black; the anklets of Rē-Harakhte and Osiris yellow, the latter's decorated with red lines.

The scepter held by Rē-Harakhte, called a *was*-scepter, is black. In his other hand he holds the "sign of life" called the *ankh* in Egyptian. It is green. The flail of Osiris is yellow with red lines, the handle outlined in black, the rest in red. The crook is yellow, markings black, the part against the dress outlined in black, the rest in red.

As for the technique, the outlines of the figures are incised and the modeling is flush with the background. The figures are, with one exception, all represented in the conventional manner, heads in profile, upper part of the body full front, and from the waist down in

profile. In the lower register the second figure from the left is shown in three-quarters view. In a number of cases the hands are incorrectly drawn. The style is Egyptian but there is a lack of refinement and a crudeness of representation in some features which are not surprising in a provincial work of this kind.

The background of the inscribed field, which is below and around the pictorial field, is white. The framing-lines are red and the signs blue. The inscriptions above and between the figures are treated in the same way. The lower portion of the stela is inscribed with a hymn of praise to Rē-Harakhte. The extracts from the inscription, given below, are phrases usual in these sun-hymns. Reading from right to left it commences with the words: "Praise to Rē-Harakhte when he shines in the eastern horizon of the sky. Thou shinest and thou appearest as king of the gods; the gods praise thee . . . Beautiful art thou, Amonrē, thou original one of the Two Lands. Hail to thee who cometh renewed; thou assumest the forms which thou desirest . . . thou goest to rest in the midst of the Underwaters in order to illuminate the Underworld . . . When thou shinest in the morning thou illuminest those who are yonder; thou causest that one see his face in the morning . . . to the ka of Osiris, Overseer of the Treasury of the Lord of the Two Lands in Nubia, Mery . . . to the ka of the Songstrees of Amūn, Taweretherty."

Across the top and continuing down the sides are two prayers, to Osiris and Rē-Harakhte. Commencing at the center of the top, the one to the right reads: "An offering which the king gives to Osiris, great king, first of the Westerners," etc. The other is similar: "An offering which the king gives to Rē-Harakhte, lord of the gods(?)," etc.

The text is very corrupt and the hieroglyphs, which are incised, crudely cut. In some cases signs have been cut but never painted, while in others, the painted signs differ from those originally cut.

The stela is surmounted by a molded cornice which is decorated with palm-leaves on a white ground colored from left to right, blue-red-blue-green repeated. The surrounding line is black.

There is a complete break in the stone which runs diagonally through the upper section of the inscribed face. The stela is 1.51 meters high and 0.785 meters wide. It is 0.94 meters wide at the base. Woolley treated the stela briefly in *The Museum Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3 and in the near future it will be published with other Anibeh material by Professor Steindorff of Leipzig. M. L. M.