

**STELA OF BAKENKHONSU, HIGH PRIEST OF AMUN-RE
[Pl. XXIV]**

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A quartzite stela of Bakenkhonsu, High Priest of Amun-Re, was found during excavations of the Sphinx Avenue in Luxor in 2006⁽¹⁾ (cf. fig. 1 and Pl. XXIV). The stela is dated to the fourth regnal year of Setnakht, the first king of the Twentieth Dynasty. It was found on the Avenue of Sphinxes, located east of the Suzanne Mubarak Library, by the Luxor Inspectorate of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) during excavations under my supervision. On December 11, 2006, the stela was discovered with its inscribed surface face down, 0,50 m below the surface, beside a palm tree. It is possible that it was removed from its original location at Karnak temple many years ago, and subsequently hidden here for sale, but fortunately it was left abandoned. It is now stored in the main Luxor antiquities magazine at Abu al-Gud.

DESCRIPTION

The stela of Bakenkhonsu measures 132 cm in height. Its width increases from the top to the bottom; the width at the bottom of the lunette scene is 70,5 cm, while the width of the base is 77 cm. The depth of the stela at the top is 14 cm, while it increases to 28 cm at the base. The surfaces of the thickness of the stela show traces of two parallel columns containing erased texts, each measuring 4,5 cm in width on the top and sides. On the back of the stela is an incised frame still visible along the top and sides ; faint traces of erased figures can still be observed within this frame.

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⁽¹⁾ The stela is registered under number 37 in the Abu al-Gud magazine in Luxor.

The stela, decorated with figures and texts in sunk relief, is divided into two sections : the rounded upper part (lunette) and the seventeen lines of horizontal text below. The lunette depicts the king offering Maat (order) to Amun-Re and Mut, surrounded by eleven columns of text. Below the lunette scene are seventeen lines of text, accompanied by a kneeling figure of Bakenkhonsu in the lower right corner, with three vertical columns of text in front of him and also behind.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This stela is particularly interesting for several reasons. It gives the highest attested regnal year of Setnakht. The text also suggests that the king was appointing the family members of his military colleagues, such as the «Chief scribe of the recruits of the Domain of Amun, Amenemopet», to important priestly positions. These appointments had already begun earlier in the New Kingdom, such as the transition between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties under Horemheb, demonstrating the increasing interrelationships and combined military and priestly powers that were to become a pattern during the late Twentieth and Twenty-first Dynasties.

Of particular interest in the main text is the non-royal assumption of traditional elements of the «Königsnovelle», including the theme of the discovery of damage to ancestral and divine monuments, as a symbol of the effects of disorder. This is followed by the reversal of such effects by restoring the monuments and dedicating offerings, as a symbol of the restoration of order (Maat), which is represented by the scene in the lunette of the stela. However, in the text, it is not the king who is credited with the restoration of order but Bakenkhonsu, who also provides a monument for his own ritual provisions to ensure eternal sustenance.

THE TEXT

The text of the stela of Bakenkhonsu is problematic, and contains unusual writings and grammatical constructions that require the expertise of philologists. For the present, however, a summary of the text's contents is provided here, together with a photograph and a facsimile drawing of the stela, kindly provided by the Centre Franco-Égyptien d'Étude des Temples de Karnāk (CFEETK). It is hoped that this publication will stimulate further discussion and analysis of this unique text.

The first line of the text gives regnal year four, the highest attested date for Setnakht, with an unusual absence of the seasonal month and day. The beginning of the second line refers to an unspecified day when the events described took place, followed by a description of Bakenkhonsu's maternal origins and the suggestion that he may have been granted his exalted position by the god himself. The end of the third line through the middle of the seventh line indicate that Bakenkhonsu found the statues of the earlier kings and important officials thrown down, due to a civil disturbance involving vandalism by the common people. Bakenkhonsu then recounts how he had the statues re-erected in the great stone court (perhaps the "Cour de la Cachette" or the court between the third and fourth pylons), including the establishment of the presentation of offerings. He also had a statue (or perhaps this stela) set up with the restored statues to commemorate his good deeds.

TRANSLITERATION

In front of the god Amun-Re :

Imn-R^c nb nswt t³wy

dī.n.ī n.k ḥnh w³s nb ḥr.ī

dī.n.ī n.k snb nb ḥr.ī

dī.n.ī n.k ḥḥ m nswt t³wy

In front of the goddess Mut :

Mwt wrt nbt pt

In front of the King :

Nb t³wy (Wsr-ḥ^cw-R^c mry Imn stp-n-R^c)

Nb ḥ^cw (Stš-nḥt mrr R^c <mry> Imn)

dī ḥnh mī R^c

Behind the King :

s³ ḥnh

Ḥr k³ nḥt wr pḥty



Fig. 1 – Stela of Bakenkhonsu. [Drawing © Centre Franco-Égyptien d'Étude des Temples de Karnak].

Between the god Amun-Re and the King :

hnk m m³t n nb šps

Under the lunette :

- (1) *h³t-sp 4 hr hm n Hr k³ nht wr-ph³ty nisw-bity (Wsr-h³w-R^c <mry> Imn stp n R^c) s³ R^c (Stš-nht mrr R^c mry Imn-r^c)*
- (2) *hrw pn is(t) rf wn hm-ntr tpy n Imn m Ipt-iswt m ddi Imn ds.f B³k-n-hnsw rn.f m³^c-hrw*
- (3) *ms n B³kt-mwt m ms(w) n pr.f dr w^c s³t w^c m wndw.w nt w³st ist m³³.n.f*
- (4) *snnwt nt hsyw tww(t) nt tpyw-^c hntfw nt*
- (5) *niswt špssw h³^c(w) h<³>nrw m kniw n sbtyw nt gbbtyw (?) nhyw*
- (6) *hr drww ktw hr psdw m wsht ³t n bwn-r nt hwt-ntr*
- (7) *hrw n drwt nt hwrw r fnd. sn h^c n nw.f*
- (8) *iry.f sm³ww diw.f hprw t³y nb nty im.sn mi nty hpr diw.f*
- (9) *f³y.tw.w smn.n.f sn m wsht ³t hbyt nt inr nty w³hy.tw*
- (10) *htpw-ntr n Imn im.st r šnyw. f m b^ch.sn šnw.f w^cb w³h.n.sn hwt pr (iw)*
- (11) *m-b^ch kbh sntr rnpw hwt nb nfr iw.w hr m³³ Imn Mwt Hnsw m h^c.sn m hb-wp-r^c mn nb nty im sn gry*
- (12) *iw^cw hr w³h n sn mw di.f hprw ms*
- (13) *m š^cw h^c n smnti n hm-ntr tpy n Imn B³k-n-hnsw m³^c-hrw*
- (14) *twf.hn^c sn n mrwt dit mnti.f*
- (15) *mi kdw sn r nhh hn^c dt m pr Imn in iry-p³t*
- (16) *h^cty-^c it-ntr mry hry-sš t³ m pt t³ dw³t b³ty (?) n K³-mwt.f sm*
- (17) *m ³ht nhh hm-ntr tpy n imn B³k-n-hnsw m³^c-hrw (?) m dd imn ds.f*

In front of the kneeling figure of Bakenkhonsu and behind (lower right corner) :

(18) *ḥm-nṯr tpy n Ḳmn*

(19) *B3k-n-ḥnsw*

(20) *m3ꜥ-ḥrw s3 s3b*

(21) *imy-r sš nfrw n pr-Ḳmn Ḳmn-m-ipt*

TRANSLATION⁽²⁾

In front of the god Amun-Re :

“Amun-Re, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands”

“I give you all life and dominion coming from me”

“I give you all health coming from me”.

“I give you eternity as King of the Two Lands”

In front of the goddess Mut :

“Mut the Great, mistress of the sky”.

In front of the King :

“Lord of the Two Lands, (Userkhaure Meriamun Setepenre”

“Lord of the crowns or appearances, (Sethnakht, Merer-Re Meriamun)”

“given life like Re”.

”

⁽²⁾ I would like to thank Edwin Brock, Dr. Eugene Cruz-Uribe, Dr. Steve Vinson, and Jacqueline Jay for their expertise in the translation of this difficult text.

Behind the King :

“Protection and life <upon him>”

“The Hórus, Mighty Bull, Great of strength, given life”.

Between the god Amun-Re and the King :

“Offering Maât to the noble lord”.

Under the lunette :

“(1) Regnal year 4 under the Majesty of the Horus, Mighty Bull, Great of Strength, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, (Userkhaure-Meriamun Setepenre), Son of Re, (Sethnakht, Merer-Re, Beloved of Amun), beloved of Amun-Re. (2) Today. Now, there being the High Priest of Amun in Karnak , being as the one whom Amun himself appoints, whose name is Bakenkhonsu, the justified, (3) born of Baketmut, as one born of his (temple) estate, since (he is) a unique one of the daughter, a unique one from the common folk of Thebes⁽³⁾ ; now, he having seen (4) that they are the images of the praised ones (the deceased) and the statues-*tww(t)* of the ancestors, the statues-*hntfw* of (5) the august kings which have fallen into a state of destruction in the enclosure of the gates of the open court, some (6) on their sides, others on their backs, in the great outer forecourt of the temple, (7) by the hands of the poor people, having fallen to their fronts, there upon he gathered all of them together, (8) and he made their renewal, and he caused every criminal act which had happened to them to be like it had not happened, and he caused (9) them to be transported and he set them up in the great stone festival court wherein the god’s offerings (10) of Amun are placed, to enclose it within that he might direct a purification, so that they might place things (offerings) which are brought (11) before (the god) : all good cool, fresh, and young things upon seeing Amun, Mut, Khonsu in their appearances at every first day of the month festival in which they are in (12) the heirs (of the god) placing water (offerings) so that he might cause that the births happen (13) as fated (?). Then the High Priest of Amun Bakenkhonsu, justified, set up (14) his statue with them through the desire that one might cause that he endure (15) like them forever and ever in the Domain of Amun. It is the hereditary (16) count and prince, the beloved

⁽³⁾ Dr. Steve Vinson offers the following suggestion : read *dr* for *n-drt* “in the hand of”; “being as one who is born in his house through a unique daughter, a unique one from the common folk of Thebes”.

god's father, overseer of secrets in heaven, earth and netherworld, foremost one (?) [or "bati-priest"] of the Bull-of-his-mother, the *sem*-priest (17) in the "Horizon of Eternity," the High Priest of Amun, Bakenkhonsu, justified, who is as one whom Amun himself appoints".

In front of the kneeling figure of Bakenkhonsu and behind (lower right corner) :

"(18) The High Priest of Amun, (19) Bakenkhonsu, justified, (20) Son of the dignitary, (21) Chief-scribe of recruits of the Domain of Amun, Amenemopet".

Pl. XXIV STELA OF BAKENKHONSU, HIGH PRIEST OF AMUN-RE



Stela of Bakenkhonsu. [Cliché © Centre Franco-Égyptien d'Étude des Temples de Karnak].